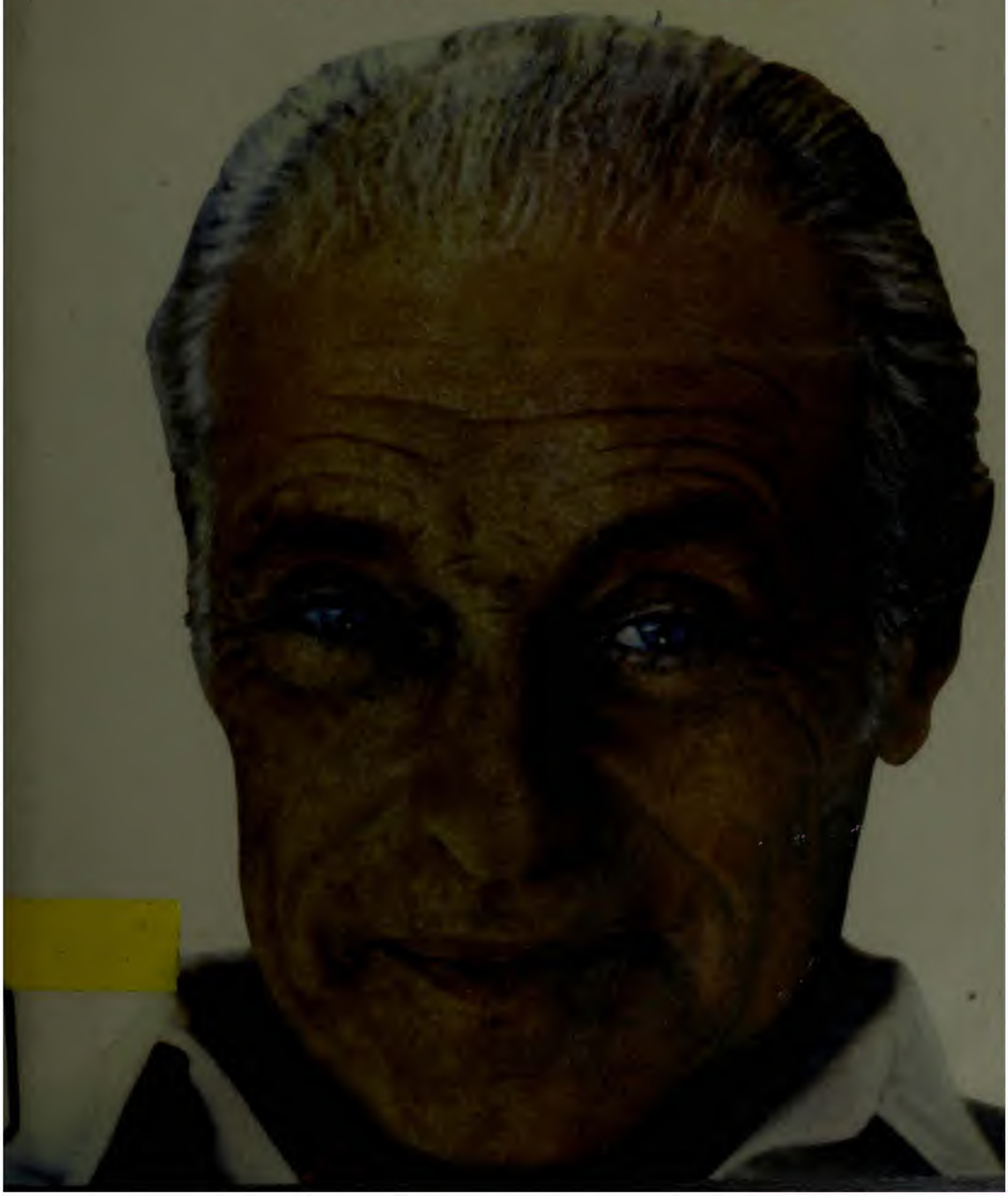
Guy de Rothschild

— THE WHIMS OF FORTUNE —



The Rothschild name stands for vast wealth, power and social grandeur. But it is also a blazon of Jewish identity, bringing a concomitant responsibility.

The author neither apologizes for his good fortune nor complains about his many trials. He writes vividly about his childhood at Ferrières, the legendary shoots, summers at Biarritz, Deauville and the Côte d'Azur – all that before mass tourism had been invented. He loved fast cars, all the glamour and gaiety of a world which crashed at the beginning of the Second World War.

With equal verve he recalls the fall of France and its impact on his family, the troubles of exile, his near-death when torpedoed in the Atlantic, the struggles and pride of the war-time French group in London, as well as his perplexed confrontation with Vichy anti-Semitism, his success in rebuilding the family bank after the war, the attempted kidnapping of his son . . .

Rothschild Frères prospered in the post-war years, and Guy de Rothschild was a shrewd and prescient financier, while continuing the family's tradition of scrupulous probity. There is an intriguing portrait of Georges Pompidou, for some time a Director of the bank and a close friend, and of his relationship with de Gaulle before his elevation to President.

Yet there were legendary balls and splendour too, and the dynamic energy of Marie-Hélène, whose personality is central to an extraordinary and very moving story.

Illustrated

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The Whims of Fortune

Guy de Rothschild

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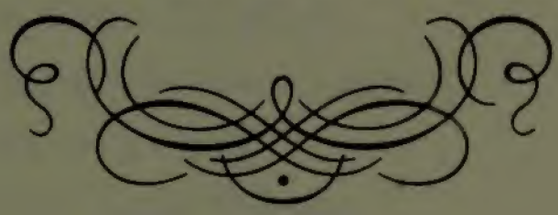

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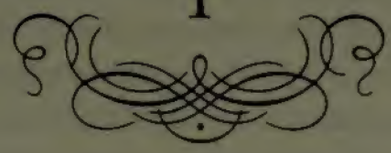
To MARIE-HELENE
without whom things would
only be just what they are

CHAPTER

I



Much Ado About Money

Everyone has it, no one has enough. People loathe it when it is absent; they welcome it with open arms. Reluctant to discuss it, they think of nothing else. Life blood of the economy, jack-of-all-trades, key to success, symbol of strength, it is the essence of power. It cures, it destroys, it saves, it kills, it is idle, it circulates, it fertilizes, it vanishes, it corrupts, it grows, it changes hands. It is hard-earned, it is contemptible. It is used, dreamed of, hidden, shown off, squandered, scorned, worshipped. Hoarded, it is a treasure – only to become sterile. It is reviled, repudiated, coveted. People invest it with their own intimate feelings, their rivalries, their triumphs, their frustrations, their ambitions, their resentments. At night it grows into something real, overpowering, enlightening, protective, crushing. A phantasmagorical god, it is implored and dreaded. It is the scapegoat for our misfortunes. Created for our convenience, we make it bear our emotions; it was a means, it has become an end.

What has not been said about money? What has not been attempted by politicians to tame it? Taking equality for justice, the socialists want to ration it and try, without much success, to remove its power. Liberals, more realistic, want to use its potential as an incentive. Yet both seek the well-being, the security and happiness of humankind.

How amazed I was when the newly-elected French Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy, addressing Parliament in 1981, criticized the heads of 'big business' for endeavouring to make them earn money, which is precisely what they were meant to do and what they are paid for! If the managers of Air France, Renault, the big banks and the nationalized companies heed these remarks and ignore their profit and loss accounts, the French, who will have to foot the bill, will hardly look favourably on M. Mauroy's angelic idealism. Because those who do not gain, lose – and most often lose heavily.

The socialists dream of abolishing capitalism, but they can't, for since the Marxist mirage vanished, there is nothing to put in its place. If they were fair, they'd accept the rules of the game and, as long as people are

allowed to make money, they'd refrain from denouncing those who succeed. Everyone wants to be better off: the minimum wage-earner wants to make more, and so do those who earn twice his salary. So why in the world brand someone who is paid four times as much a 'sordid materialist' the minute he wants to make it six? There will always be someone poorer than oneself, and there will always be someone richer. Admittedly, there is an intolerable discrepancy between those who can afford more than essential needs and those who fall below the level of survival; but this contrast appears mostly between industrial societies and those of the Third World, rather than within western nations. Making money doesn't oblige people to forfeit their honour or their conscience.

In France, of course, money has never been honourable, except perhaps during the 19th century. The Church put it on the index in medieval times, and ever since the age of industrialism, socialists and Marxists have held it responsible for every evil. It is a foregone conclusion that money will always remain impure. And yet, how herculean the efforts to acquire it!

The French, whether hypocritical or irrational, it doesn't matter, have no trouble in getting round their own contradiction: they simply cherish their own possessions while condemning everyone else's. Among all peoples, their love of money is doubtless the keenest, as every Frenchman suspects every other of being motivated by selfish materialistic considerations. Property, savings and inheritance are sacred; money itself and finance are suspect. The French cling to their pathological distinction between their little nest egg and anonymous riches labelled 'finance'. This fantasy provides an alibi for the inventors of wealth tax, euphemistically referred to as the 'tax on large fortunes', levied on an aggregate of static property, impossible for the most part to divide or liquidate; whereas only those profits earned through the dynamic flux of the country's economy qualify for annual withholding.

In the final analysis, societies, like individuals, involve their whole nature in their relationship with money. The rich are regarded with ambivalence. One wants a kind of paternal protection from them, and simultaneously one envies and rejects them. People expect them to feel superior, and then revolt against what is an imaginary humiliation. No one sees the rich as brothers, but as members of another species; money isolates them. In their own eyes, however, the advantages money brings them are too easy; the wealthy value only what they earn by personal merit.

Mere mortals made of blood, flesh and bone, the Rothschilds have always symbolized money and everything it represents: luxury, fame, power. And should any of them be so ill-advised as to boast about it, he'd

immediately be as unpopular as he is well known. It's hardly their fault if, among the many 'wealthy few', they are singled out as a show-piece. What little prestige they might have gained from their relationships with the future statesmen René Mayer, and particularly Georges Pompidou, was entirely fortuitous, as the Rothschilds knew them before they became public figures. Any analogy which might be drawn between that and the special relationships their ancestors enjoyed in the 19th century with Europe's leaders would be quite mistaken. A temporary illusion appeared, however, for a moment to revive a legend from the past. And it is one of life's fatal ironies that shortly thereafter the Rothschild Bank was nationalized, thus sweeping away what had been for two centuries their professional identity.

Close up, the Rothschilds are decent people. They fulfil their obligations discreetly and without arrogance. They are referred to as 'the Rothschilds'. It is only collectively that they are a symbol. Condemned to solidarity by ancestors who chose *Concordia*, *Integritas*, *Industria* as the family motto, they are forever worrying that one of their own will damage the family reputation, each member regarding the shortcomings of the others without indulgence. Among themselves, of course, they are equals, like Roman citizens, for the similarity of their fates erases any individual difference. The inevitable disagreements usually end with everyone sitting down to a meal prepared with infinite care, as much out of mutual affection as culinary competition.

I have no idea what a poor Rothschild would look like. I suppose he would vanish in anonymity. In the meantime, precious few of them are driven by a money-making obsession or by an urge to rebuild a fortune comparable to that of their ancestors. They tend to make the best of what they have (now and then a little more), each according to his particular tastes. Their life-styles, however, are remarkably similar, as well as their choice of homes and art. The emphasis put on beauty, the importance given to quality, to elegant hospitality, are characteristic of a family tradition which gives precedence to refinement before luxury. How long can this last? It doesn't seem to go with the trend of history.

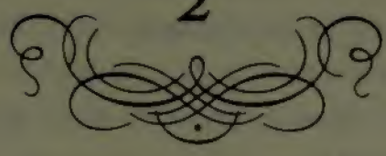
As far as I'm concerned, life may have spoiled me in many ways, but I have never forgotten the restrictions and humiliations suffered by my ancestors, who knew only hard, obsessive work. This memory has helped me face situations in which I saw how easily I could lose material security as well as the social pride generations have acquired.

Bathed from childhood in the embarrassing limelight of celebrity, the Rothschilds can hardly avoid a certain narcissism which prompts them to justify by their behaviour a reputation they'd like to deserve. Some might even secretly fear not being quite up to it. But when all is said and done,

conscious of the favours heaven has bestowed upon them, they bear gallantly a symbolic name, accepting with good heart the whims of fortune.

CHAPTER

2



Once Upon a Time

In fairy-tales, life flows gently by for rich little children in romantic castles. Princesses and princes with long curly hair spend their childhood in happy laughter amid dazzling fêtes and magnificent balls, waiting for their true love to come and deliver them from some enemy, or maybe only from the misery of solitude.

My sisters and I spent our childhood following our parents from one home to another, all of them castles, or at least a close resemblance. But my memories are in no way similar to the enchanted atmosphere that I too used to read about in story books. Our lives were simpler, more innocent – more natural, too.

The castle of my childhood was a château called Ferrières, which holds so many memories for me that I can reconstruct an entire universe around it. Throughout the years, until the day I decided to close it, it lived almost a human existence with all its ups and downs: the sombre periods when it was twice occupied by the Germans, first in 1870, then in 1940; its spell of languor when it gradually declined; its renaissance intended as a wedding present; and the final hour of enchantment it knew before sinking into lethargy again. The hopes of a renewed life that my second wife Marie-Hélène and I held for it when we gave it to the University of Paris were dreams that did not come true, and today the château has fallen into a sad and dreamless sleep.

For my sisters and myself, Ferrières was 'home', the scene of countless experiences, banal and extraordinary, which form the incomparable landscape of one's earliest memories. In retrospect, the life I led and which seemed perfectly normal – a child unquestioningly accepts the world around him for a long time – that life so fascinating in many ways, almost unreal, full of strange and sometimes comical images, seemed to us at the time to be slow and humdrum, punctuated by long moments of boredom and emptiness.

And yet the magic was there. At regular intervals, the sleeping castle in its dark forest awoke. And the old child in me wants to recapture a few of

these images, to relive some of those events. Neither sentimentally nor critically; I merely hope to resuscitate for a moment that theatre of shadows now forever silent. Its actors have vanished; nobody will ever live that kind of life again or know the frenzy and sweetness of an era when everything was possible. As a witness to it, I feel duty-bound to try, at least, to revive its memory . . .

In 1829, my great-grandfather, James de Rothschild, purchased the property of Ferrières from the heirs of Fouché, Napoleon's Minister of Police. There was then only a small château on the edge of a pond, and some land which James expanded through a series of acquisitions. Already rich, he decided to build a residence on this domain worthy of his success and social ambitions – no doubt also a subconscious symbol of revenge by a former ghetto child. He began by draining the land, landscaping the grounds, erecting farm buildings. According to the *Illustrated London News*, Ferrières soon became known as 'France's model farm'. Then he had the little château razed, and not a trace of it remains.

The construction of the new château was expected to take some twenty years, but work progressed far more rapidly than foreseen. The first stone was laid in July 1855, and the building was completed in 1859 – a miraculous achievement then. While the construction was under way, James lived in the hunting lodge which was later incorporated in a long building that became the stables.

He had engaged a famous English architect and landscaper, Joseph Paxton, who, like himself, was a self-made man: a gardener's son, he'd started out by assisting his father on the estate of the Duke of Devonshire. He served his apprenticeship as gardener from the age of fifteen, worked his way up, married the bailiff's daughter, and finally attracted attention as both a gardener and an architect. Among his most famous buildings was the Crystal Palace. Perhaps in royal recognition of this triumph, Paxton was knighted.

Sent to the Far East by his friend the Duke of Devonshire, Paxton brought back and acclimatized all sorts of exotic trees and plants till then unknown in Europe. In addition to his talent and lightning success, he possessed sufficient audacity and originality to win over my great-grandfather.

Paxton's plan for the château of Ferrières was at first sight very simple: an immense square edifice flanked at each corner by square turrets surmounted by spires (later replaced by cupolas). The façades were relatively austere, the only touch of fantasy being a gallery on the north-east side, enclosed by an Italian-style colonnade. At the centre of this imposing structure was an immense room with a skylight: the 'main hall'.

This was the very heart of Ferrières. Two storeys high, it was surrounded on the first floor by reception rooms, various drawing rooms, dining rooms, and games rooms, while the upper floor was reserved for the private apartments. There were bedrooms on every side, and a corridor encircled the main hall halfway up. One could go directly from this passageway into the hall itself through four doors which opened onto a sort of circular loggia with a balustrade, which likewise ran all round the hall at half its height. Reminiscent of the Italian loggias for serenading musicians, it also permitted the guests to cast a discreet eye on what was going on downstairs, because the main hall served as the principal living room. Oddly enough, it was isolated from the outdoors, its only daylight coming through the glass roof; in this respect, Ferrières is a living example of the general fear of sunshine in those days. The drawing rooms facing south-west were reserved for receptions, thus used mostly at night. The bedrooms considered to be most pleasant were those with a northern exposure, like those of my great-grandparents and of my grandparents. I can't imagine what circumstance – perhaps the portent of a change in attitude towards sunshine and heat? – prompted my mother to choose an apartment on the south-west façade, which received the loveliest sunlight and offered the best view. A double winding staircase led down to the vast lawns surrounding the lake.

Paxton also designed the grounds, a thousand acres enclosed by a high stone wall. He not only planted a great number of rare trees but also skilfully composed a variety of vistas and landscapes, as only the English know how to do. Several decades later, the walks were an enchantment, due as much to human genius as to the work of nature. Since my ancestors had planned to be in residence at Ferrières mostly in the autumn, Paxton carefully selected plants and trees whose colours were most splendid at that time of year. The grounds then blazed with multi-coloured fires: the usual gold and brown of French forests, but also rarer tones – the russet highlights of maples, the gleaming purple of copper beeches which Paxton had 'carelessly strewn' here and there, the blood-red of Virginia cypresses, and the blue-grey of cedars (my father's contribution). In the distance, as if springing from the centre of the lake but actually on the opposite shore, there was a tree-covered ridge crowned by a Grecian-style temple of love, the traditional goal of walks for those in a romantic mood. Further on behind the lake there was the forest, a mysterious realm of animals and shoots, which turned back towards the wings of the château, like a horseshoe.

Ferrières was hailed as the 'finest example of Second Empire style', 'a Victorian house built on an Elizabethan plan, dressed up in the mode of Napoleon III'.

The interior decoration was entrusted to the painter Eugène Lami. I still have many of his charming watercolours depicting the preliminary stages of his work as well as ideas he discarded, and just as many revisions. The dominant décor is obviously Napoleon III, but everyone readily mixed styles during the middle of the 19th century. The 'white drawing room', adjoining the main hall, was furnished in Louis XVI style, covered with tapestries on a white background; white marble statues framed the windows, and angels floated among the clouds on the painted ceiling. The period changed again on entering the *salon des cuirs* (leather salon), where separate panels painted on leather, originally a single hanging called *The Triumph of David*, depicted a larger-than-life-size procession of figures, the work of Govert Flinck, said to have been inspired by Rembrandt drawings. As a child, I was particularly impressed by one of these panels in which David, on horseback, is holding between his knees the enormous head of Goliath with the fatal stone still embedded in his forehead, his eyeballs rolled back in agony. These 'Cordoba leathers' reflected the light brilliantly, and the walls seemed aglow with their ochre, red and golden shades. In any case, they gave the room a 17th-century air, even though the great marble columns spaced round the walls were more reminiscent of the Italian Renaissance. In the main dining room, a huge Bavarian wooden fireplace added a German accent, although here too Soldani's bronze *bas-reliefs* on the doors reminded one of Italy again.

The main hall was a truly magical place. Its vast dimensions and the soft light falling through the glass roof suggested the nave of a cathedral, and its height permitted two different décors: on the upper level, the walls were covered with emerald green velvet and hung with a series of tapestries (one of which was slashed to ribbons in 1870, the others disappearing during the 1940 Occupation). On the lower half, at eye level, were a number of paintings, including some of the most beautiful from my grandfather's collection: Ingres' famous portrait of my great-grandmother Betty;* *The Marquise Doria* by Van Dyck, later donated to the Louvre; a charming portrait of a woman by Gainsborough; and Franz Hals' *Woman with a Rose*. Busts of Roman emperors stood guard while a woman generously bared her bosom above the great marble mantelpiece. The two large doors opening onto the principal entrance were flanked by a pair of Blackamoors several metres high, who seemed to bear all the weight of the ceiling on their shoulders. A billiard table in one corner, a piano in another, Italian Renaissance cabinets delicately carved and inlaid with ebony, ivory,

* James, before my grandfather Alphonse, had begun to collect paintings by the Old Masters. But he was also interested in contemporary art and commissioned a portrait of his wife from Ingres. He wanted to have five copies made for his children, but the 1848 Revolution prevented the artist from satisfying this unusual request . . .

marble, onyx and semi-precious stones, an assortment of sofas, armchairs, benches, sideboards and tables laden with precious objects, all served to define different areas where one could be alone to read or, alternatively, gather together for conversation and games.

In the middle of the main hall was a circular couch from the centre of which a marble column seemed to spring, surmounted by an 18th-century clock that represented Atlas carrying the world on his shoulders. German armour, Italian sculpture, Flemish tapestries, Napoleon III furniture, French bronzes, Victorian chairs, various vases and bibelots; all these diverse styles were mingled in a skilful and harmonious disorder – what Boileau called 'the harmonious disorder only art can create' – and the paintings of different schools permitted unlimited combinations. The unusual atmosphere of the hall was certainly due to the startling contrast between its stately proportions and the intimacy of its décor, which gave an impression of warmth. Perhaps this is what the decorators and antique dealers describe as the 'Rothschild Style', alluding to an atmosphere that is found in most of the homes inhabited by members of my family: a Napoleon III décor, personalized not only by all sorts of *objets d'art*, but above all by a sense of comfort and intimacy which intermingles furs, flowers, plants, family photographs, precious miniatures and rare books.

Even without guests, we never felt the least bit lost in this immensity. Apart from the main hall, the 'white drawing room' and the *salon des cuirs*, this floor also contained two dining rooms, pantries and several corridors. Another less formal drawing room adjoined my mother's apartments, decorated mainly with Beauvais tapestries from cartoons by Boucher, framed in sculptured wooden panels. The pastoral or frivolous scenes they depicted made the room seem even warmer and more welcoming; a fire always blazed in the fireplace, enhancing and enlivening the pinks and reds of the tapestries, and huge sofas covered with furs added to the atmosphere of comfort. My mother loved being there and having us with her there, and this part of the house was reserved for the family.

Finally, at the far end of this main floor was a small corner room we called 'the synagogue', where my great-grandfather celebrated the Sabbath, and which still contained his prie-dieu, pulpits and prayer books. But my father, who was not so rigorous an observer of the religious life, hardly ever used it.

The vast dimensions of these rooms and the height of the ceilings obviously required a monumental and majestic staircase leading to the bedrooms. All along the walls huge canvases by Snyder, the famous animal painter, echoed the other hunting scenes in the salons: *Diane and Her Nymphs Leaving for the Hunt* by Rubens, and works by Desportes and Oudry.

The guest rooms offered one of the most original features of the château. They were really suites, each one with its own entrance hall, bedroom and sanitary facilities, and especially its private bathroom, an unheard-of extravagance at the time. Most of the spacious rooms were furnished with canopied beds, the walls covered with fabrics whose motifs suggested the name of each apartment: the 'pheasant room', the 'bird room', the 'bouquet room'. Matching materials were used in the bathrooms, where the tubs encased in mahogany or lacquered wood represented the height of luxury; when one sank into one's bath, the leaden colour of the zinc and the smooth feeling of the polished metal, its temperature scarcely warmer than that of the water itself, gave one a marvellous sensation of well-being, further enhanced by the sight of the dancing flames in the little private fireplaces. Delicious moments, and well calculated, as you can imagine, to impress guests and visitors, or at least to give them a surprising and novel experience. It must have been this kind of detail, even more than the sumptuous décor, more than the size and number of the rooms (German châteaux had at least as many) that struck Wilhelm I, then King of Prussia, when he exclaimed with admiration (and perhaps a touch of envy), 'What an incredible palace! A king would not have dared to build it. It took a Rothschild!'

Bismarck, however, did not share his enthusiasm. 'It looks like an upside-down chest of drawers!' he said with a grimace, referring to the square shape of the château and its four corner turrets. This undoubtedly reflected the opinion of the day. The architecture shocked people because it didn't resemble any traditional French style. But while nobody went into raptures over the beauty of Ferrières, everybody was enthralled by its mixture of luxury and comfort, which was then unknown in France and is, in my opinion, more of an Anglo-Saxon tradition.

A few years after Ferrières was opened, Napoleon III gave it an imperial dimension by deciding to pay it a visit on 16 December 1862. Public opinion interpreted his gesture as the desire to form a closer relationship with James, whom he had previously kept at a certain distance – or, at any rate, the sign of the end of an era during which the Pereire banking family had benefited from the imperial favours.

Journalists outdid themselves in their accounts of 'the day with the banking king'. *Le Monde Illustré* wrote of 'the model farm, the finest in Europe' . . . 'the hall which is the Baron's private museum' . . . and described the Emperor as decked out in a dark fancy-dress outfit that looked like the national costume of Brittany. As the French flag waved atop the château, 'the ladies of the family gathered on the staircase . . . The Emperor inspected all the rooms, walked around the grounds, visited the stables . . . ' They rhapsodized over the luncheon: 'gorgeous food, the

place settings even more gorgeous. Not only is there no silverware like this anywhere else in the world, but the guests ate from Sèvres porcelain signed by Boucher.'

As for the shoot, 'with twelve armed keepers and beaters in grey German-style uniforms', it was 'enormous' and the fusillade which lasted for three hours was 'terrible'; one reporter, carried away by it all, described the 'poor birds' as 'dying gladiators come to salute Caesar'; 'at nightfall, the Emperor was still able to shoot a jay, which he kept to take home to the Imperial Prince!'

'The inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, complete with mayor and parish priest, were assembled in the illuminated courtyard of the château . . . ' During the meal, the chorus from the Paris Opera sang Rossini's 'Death of the Pheasant', directed by the composer himself.

On the way back to the railway station of Ozoir-la-Ferrière, 'all the servants lined the driveways holding flaming torches', and the yew trees which had been planted every fifteen paces were 'bristling with glowing Chinese lanterns'.

Such a momentous occasion had to be commemorated by some symbol, so the Emperor, 'following a custom of the German aristocracy', planted a cedar tree. Still standing, more imperial than ever and now over a hundred years old, it majestically dominates (more than by its age, no doubt) its younger brother, which another future Emperor, Wilhelm I, thought fitting to plant eight years later.

During the siege of Paris in 1870, Ferrières had, in fact, been requisitioned as the headquarters of the King of Prussia, Bismarck and Marshall Moltke. The famous 'Ferrières Meeting', during which the French Foreign Minister Jules Favre tried in vain to obtain the 'Iron Chancellor's' signature on a peace treaty that did not require the surrender of Paris, took place in the Tapestry Room.

Bismarck is said to have enjoyed humiliating the French; he made Jules Favre wait in the hall for several hours before receiving him. Even the Crown Prince was shocked and termed the Chancellor's behaviour 'a monstrous snub'.

The King occupied my grandmother Laurie's bedroom, and gave orders that nothing be touched, 'neither the paintings in the salons nor the game on the grounds, nor the wine in the cellars'.

After the King had left, however, Bismarck did as he pleased and, despite the royal order, indulged in shooting pheasant. Baron Alphonse's butler refused to serve the wine, even when offered money for it, and he wrote an indignant letter to my grandmother describing the condition of the château after the Prussians had left at last:

Ferrières, 1 January, 1871

Madame la Baronne;

I am taking the liberty of sending you a few details about Ferrières in the hope that this letter will reach you and that perhaps you will be able to pass on this news to Madame the Baroness James and to Monsieur the Baron Alphonse.

First of all, the invasion of the grounds by the Lagny Irregulars, killing pheasant and hare, despite the protests of Monsieur Saint-Ange and the guards. September 14 and 15, arrival of the Prussians; on the 16th, General von Eupling and his staff; they were very nice and admired Ferrières; on the 17th, arrival of General Gordon and his staff; he ordered Monsieur Charles to prepare a dinner for fifteen. In the end, they were 32 at table, and very dissatisfied with the dinner. The General summoned M. Saint-Ange and told him that this was impossible, that in Madame de Rothschild's home one should be treated in a manner befitting the name and the style of the château; nevertheless, they drank 65 bottles of wine, including 32 of champagne, but it wasn't enough. The General had M. Saint-Ange taken off to the guard room escorted by four soldiers, and he had to spend the night on a bed of straw. It was sad to see this nice 75-year-old man in such a position; the next morning he was to have left with the army, but at 5 o'clock, Madame Saint-Ange went to see the General, and after much pleading obtained his pardon. I accompanied M. and Mme Saint-Ange throughout the whole sorry affair.

The 18th, departure of General Gordon; the 19th, arrival of the King and his staff. The King occupied the apartments of Mme la Baronne Alphonse, M. Bismarck the former apartment of Baron James, M. Moltke those of Mme la Baronne James. The King's visit went off very well, he had his own servants and kitchen, the domain supplied everything he needed: game, fruit and flowers; he gave us two thousand francs, but his retinue was very large, 3,000 men and 1,200 horses, divided up between us and the peasants. I myself had 4 officers and 6 soldiers, who were very well behaved, but this was not always the case, because I too was involved in an incident.

The soldiers billeted at La Tafarette fished all the ponds, but that wasn't enough for them, so they decided one night to open the sluice-gates in order to find lots of fish stranded the next morning. When I was given warning of this, I went with several of my men and a locksmith to close the gates, but at that very moment the cavalryman arrived to water the horses. Terrible disappointment, no water! The soldiers thought it was I who had had the water drained, and they dragged me to the General, who was billeted with Madame Vavasseur. I explained what had happened, but he didn't believe me; he called the guards to take me prisoner, and I was ordered to have the ponds refilled at once. As this was impossible, and as none of it was my fault, they finally let me go after a few hours.

The King went to church every Sunday with his staff. M. Jules Favre was staying at M. Saint-Ange's. If only the negotiations had stopped this horrible war, I would have planted a tree in honour of the peace, it was all agreed upon with the King – but unfortunately, it didn't turn out this way; the 5th of October, departure of the King for Versailles; the 6th and 7th, looting of

several houses in Ferrières; looting of the château wine cellars, requisitioning of blankets and mattresses for the field hospitals in the area. The King had taken care to request a written statement attesting that nothing was missing from the château at the moment of his departure, and he left behind 75 men on guard, but the officers claimed that this did not prevent requisitions for the field hospitals.

The château was visited by all the officers passing through. I assigned two of my men who speak German to M. Charles to accompany them on their tours, but even so several objects have disappeared; several princes have stayed in the château, the Duke of Mecklenbourg and the Prince of Bade; there are several field hospitals, we still have 2,000 invalids; there are no more animals on the farms, we have no more charcoal, but we still have wood. The Prussians and the poachers have killed the game; the grounds are reserved for them, the Commandant has it patrolled at night; the pheasantry and flowers are reserved, the gamekeepers were disarmed the day the Prussians arrived; there are field hospitals in all of the neighbouring châteaux, there's no money left in our cashbox, we pay with bread coupons, the farms are used as barracks, but the inhabitants still have to lodge a lot of soldiers, even more now that the railway goes all the way to Lagny.

All in all, Ferrières has been well treated, there are 25 officers at the château, they have a cook who is paid by the château, but they are very demanding; well, the requisition expenses amount to about 200 to 250 thousand francs for the château and the countryside. So that is Ferrières on the first of January 1871, and the château is very dirty. Needless to tell you, Madame la Baronne, how much we hope for peace.

I have the honour to be, Madame la Baronne, respectfully, your most devoted servant,

F. Bergman

I often think back nostalgically to this golden age, still recent enough to be familiar to me, for things had not changed much when I was a child. Nature was still unspoiled, in the suburbs as in the country, and no matter where one was, there was nothing to prevent one from hearing the beating of one's heart.

Travel by horse-drawn carriages wasn't fast, but the leisurely pace was as full of vitality as the animal itself and did not arouse the impatience travellers feel today.

Just as the time devoted to vanquishing feminine resistance engendered love and enabled it to blossom, so did the time spent joking, chatting and philosophizing enrich the spirit.

Today we fill our leisure hours with sophisticated toys technology has created for our diversion; yesterday, the slightest things made us happy.

Ferrières was not unlike many other châteaux, except perhaps for its luxury and its art collections. There are, in fact, others more beautiful, more

romantic, more grandiose, more historically important. But the nature and personality of my family and its life-style imparted to Ferrières a certain number of characteristics that belong to it alone, and which make its story unique.

First of all, its originality. While we children may not have realized it, it certainly was there. For example, one would think that a house with some thirty guest rooms must have enormous kitchens. One imagines a complete parallel 'downstairs' universe, as in the Jean Renoir film, *La Règle du Jeu*, in which the servants' world is a replica of that of the masters of the house, with all of its rites and hierarchies, its defects and absurdities.

But who could possibly imagine the kitchens at Ferrières? Since it's in their nature to emit odours that are not always pleasant, and since it's difficult to keep them out, someone had the idea of isolating the kitchens from the rest of the house. Not merely relegating them to a far end of the château, because a draught could still have wafted undesirable aromas towards the living quarters. No! They were built 150 yards away and, more precisely, buried underground! This veritable command post, consisting of several rooms, was connected to the pantries inside the château by a tunnel through which a miniature railway train on roller bearings carried the food between the kitchen and the château, while warming candles underneath the trays kept the dishes at the proper temperature. We saw nothing strange in this reality of another era, in fact, this was one of our favourite playgrounds. We used to help push the little train and its heavy wagons, on which we sometimes had a ride, squeezed in between two platters. I often used to visit the kitchens themselves, which were, incidentally, very well lit by a skylight camouflaged from passers-by by a curtain of shrubs. I have a hazy recollection of the chef enthroned in solitary splendour in the middle of his domain, isolated in a glass cage, giving orders to a battalion of scullions who scurried in all directions, while an enormous spit turned in front of a furiously blazing fire.

Heating the château was not a simple matter. In the basement, a huge furnace with an insatiable appetite, a veritable bottomless pit, requiring constant feeding (it consumed several cords of wood a day), provided the hot water as well as heat for the ground floor, the drawing rooms and the corridors. The rest of the château, the bedrooms and bathrooms, were heated by individual fireplaces. Keeping these fires burning entailed the mobilization of several people. Specially designed trolleys on little wheels rolled through the corridors, carrying logs that were deposited in huge chests situated in strategic spots, where the chambermaids and footmen assigned to this task came to replenish their supplies. In my bed at night, when the lights had been turned off, I loved to contemplate the ballet of shadows created by the flames as they danced on the walls, glided across

the ceiling, and prepared me for strange dreams . . .

The basements were another of our favourite places in the château. Numerous corridors were linked together as in a labyrinth: dark, almost frightening, with their pipes running in all directions, their doors leading to forbidden rooms: servants' quarters, wine cellars. And there were more kitchens, pantries, storage rooms, a linen room with capacious cupboards, and a sort of smoking-room decorated with trophies of boars and stags, which was used especially after the shoot and exclusively by the men. Finally, there were a few private apartments: one of them was for a long time reserved for my Aunt Ephrussi, and later we children sought refuge there during World War I.

When the Germans were close enough to Paris to bombard it, we were taken to Ferrières along with our cousins, Diane, Alain, Cécile and Elie. We found it most amusing to be awakened during the night when 'Big Bertha' boomed a bit louder than usual. We were supposed to stay 'hidden' under the main staircase which, according to an architect, offered the best protection. When an enormous explosion shattered the window panes one afternoon, we found the situation less fun; we were obliged to remain for hours under the staircase, our hearts in our mouths, until someone finally arrived to reassure our terrified nannies with the news that it wasn't Big Bertha at all, but a munitions warehouse that had blown up at Le Courneuve, causing repercussions over more than 30 kilometres.

The cellars, where there was always a host of servants running about, were an ideal playground for games of hide-and-seek, roller-skating and other pastimes. (Although its atmosphere seems somewhat surrealistic to me now, it then held a certain charm.)

Another spot in this underground part of the château particularly fascinated me because of the strange music that came from it at certain hours. On a wooden panel running the length of the wall, hung at least three dozen little bells, which were supposed to indicate the room from which the family or guests were calling. Since electricity did not exist at the time the château was built, each room was equipped with a bell-pull that connected through an intricate system of cables and pulleys to the corresponding bell. At the end of the circuit, a wire in the basement set in motion a sort of metal coil; this was 'the bell'. In order for the servants to have enough time to come and see which bell was ringing, a pendulum was set in motion and swung for several minutes. The system was refined even further: each coil was different and thus sounded a different note, so that an experienced ear could immediately tell where each call was coming from. And sometimes newly-hired footmen could be heard arguing in a dialogue straight out of Ionesco:

'It's the pheasants!'

'I tell you it's red damask!'

'No, no! It's the Baron Edouard!'

And so it was that at certain hours, at breakfast time, for instance, a 'Bell Song' was played – though not the one from *Lakmé*.

We also loved the bedroom floor. One of our favourite games consisted of getting up after we'd been put to bed, creeping stealthily out of our rooms, and silently opening one of the doors that led onto the inside gallery of the main hall. There, on all fours, stifling our nervous laughter, we used to watch whatever our parents and their guests might be doing downstairs.

In those days, the servants' world was a completely separate one, but one we children knew well. Including the butlers, footmen, kitchen staff, laundresses, maids, cleaning women and the fire-feeders, there must have been at least thirty people 'below stairs'. On certain weekends, when guests brought their own chauffeurs, valets and loaders for the shoot, more than fifty people were fed in the vast servants' dining room. When my great-grandfather James was alive, the château could put up as many as a hundred servants.

Among all the positions of the 'household staff', some were particularly prized. In my grandfather's time, so the story goes, the most coveted job was that of the 'grand admiral', whose duties consisted of rowing about the lake at mealtimes, floating slowly among the swans, in order to enliven the landscape and offer the guests a poetic and charming spectacle.

There was another member of the staff whose only function was to prepare salads. My father, a fine gourmet, must have found a salad particularly delicious one day, and probably decided that the creator of this tasty dish should henceforth be officially in charge of seasoning.

Then there was the 'still-room' maid, who was neither exactly a pastry cook nor exactly a baker, but an expert in making muffins, scones, buns and all the fancy breadstuffs so appreciated by the English. My father, who often went to England in his youth (his mother was English), had always adored these things, and one fine day he decided to send for a specialist. I can still see her, a red-headed English woman, baking every day in a special room – although nobody ate the food because it was supposed to be fattening.

I also remember a man who came from the neighbouring village of Lagny every Monday to calibrate the chimes, rewind and verify the numerous clocks in the château. It took him an entire day.

In my grandparents' time, the grounds were looked after by a veritable battalion of gardeners – fifty of them. A famous story was told about my grandmother who, while visiting friends one autumn day, was enraptured

by the sight of a lawn strewn with fallen leaves. 'It's magnificent! How beautiful!' she exclaimed, 'but where do you get them from?' It seems, of course, that she had never had the occasion to see a dead leaf on a lawn nor even on a path. The story is too good to be true, but it is one of the family legends that continues to be told, half-smilingly, but also half-believed.

In my time we still had little wooden boxes, referred to as 'first-aid stations', which were nailed to certain trees and contained the indispensable articles for first aid. They dated from the previous generation when a child once hurt himself while running about the grounds. Our nannies had to memorize the exact location of each box, but these 'gadgets' disappeared during World War I.

Later on, there was even a tweed factory that sold its products to my parents' friends! But this was not merely an example of wanton luxury; my father financed the enterprise during the Depression in order to provide jobs for the unemployed villagers.

If I have drawn from my stream of memories these anecdotes and details that may seem to smack of snobbery, it is, needless to say, without the slightest intention of impressing anybody. On the contrary, what still astonishes me today is how perfectly natural all of these things seemed, as if God on the seventh day had created the world in the image of my childhood universe, as if children everywhere lived in châteaux with countless rooms and hosts of servants solely occupied in satisfying their masters' every desire. Moreover, it was not a divided world, with my parents, their friends and children on one side, and the servants on the other. It was simply the world that surrounded me, and where nothing could really surprise me – nothing, not even what usually frightens children, like werewolves and bogeymen.

However, I did once encounter a beast at Ferrières whose image returned to haunt and terrify me every night. It was during a particularly cold winter, one of those winters when even the wild boars migrate to the south. The gamekeepers killed an enormous old 'solitary' boar and brought the monstrous beast back in one of the big wood carts. The bloody carcass must have made a deep impression on me. In any case, every night at bedtime, when I had to climb the main staircase to the bedrooms and pass a painting of a hunting scene in which a boar, having disembowelled a couple of dogs, confronted the rest of the pack, I was seized with an uncontrollable panic. I'd close my eyes, run and dive into my bed as quickly as possible, pulling the covers over my head, trembling in every limb. Every night the vision of that powerful, hostile beast filled me with terror, undoubtedly associated with some unconscious fear of aggression that I couldn't shake off. And every morning, in the daylight, I could

never understand why I should have been so scared.

Ferrières was opened only in the autumn, and we lived there for three almost uninterrupted months. The term, not to mention the idea, of a 'weekend' was then unknown; my parents went 'for the season', taking up residence there as a generation earlier 'the Court took up residence at Compiègne'. Just imagine all that was involved in this massive move into a totally different life!

The installation in our 'autumn quarters' began early in October, although it was not yet permanent because the racing season at Longchamp wasn't over and my father, who owned a large stable, never missed a race in which his horses were running. On racing days he therefore stayed overnight in Paris; it was out of the question to make the round trip in a single day, even though it took barely more than an hour to cover the 35 kilometres between Paris and Ferrières. Yet my father loved to drive. When he was young, he'd been given one of the first Mercedes, doubtless a model with a 'driving stick' instead of a steering wheel; but in the end he'd given up what was then considered a 'daring' sport and two or three 'mechanics' had taken over the care and driving of his magnificent shiny automobiles. I remember in particular a Rolls and a Delaunay, both very hard to handle with their heavy steering, absence of brakes on the front wheels, and other inconveniences that would make one smile today.

Once the shooting season was under way, my parents went to Paris only for two days or so in the middle of the week. What did they do the rest of the time?

Sunday was the only day devoted to shooting, as my father observed the Sabbath. The shoot was the great event, a kind of fête that brought a multitude of people together, and I'll describe it later.

During the rest of the week, life at Ferrières resembled the descriptions in 19th-century Russian novels, a sort of French version of *A Month in the Country*. My father rose late, dealt with his correspondence, read the newspapers, wrote . . . I can still see him, his glasses perched on his nose, bent over the dossiers from the Bank of France or the Compagnie du Nord that had been sent down from Paris. Sometimes, but not often, due to the lack of partners, he had a game of bridge; but it seems to me that we kept mostly to ourselves on weekdays. In the afternoon, my father played golf and persuaded my mother to join him. He often spent long hours initiating us into the mysteries of billiards, pretending to enjoy it, and these games always ended too soon for us. Billiards was no fun without him. Sometimes our parents also tried to teach us bridge, but my mother, who played badly, soon lost her patience, while my father remained serene and smiling.

We also tried to hold seances, but only for fun, not really to invoke the

spirits. It took us quite a while to realize that this particular game worked only when my father was involved. Despite our suspicions, he swore he never touched a thing; he maintained a rather absent air, as if his thoughts were elsewhere. And we never caught him at it.

Then there was the ceremony of afternoon tea. Whenever neighbouring friends had been invited, we had to listen in silence to interminable conversations that meant nothing to us. Finally, there were the everlasting walks we had to take from one part of the grounds to another and around the château.

Our parents fulfilled various charitable duties in the village, but in fact they really hadn't much to do. They were probably happy just to let life flow gently on . . .

I can still see them both, strolling around the grounds, arm in arm. I can see my mother at the wheel of an antediluvian four-seater Torpedo-Citroën convertible, which she drove only for her own amusement, or perhaps for what was her idea of 'a bit of exercise', since people then were obsessed with nature and the open air. This car, which was driven only around the grounds at Ferrières, lasted for ages, because I drove it myself until I was about twenty years old. It crept along very slowly, like an adult toy equipped with gears, a vague sort of a windscreen, and elementary brakes. It was a strange sight to see this ancient wheezing vehicle suddenly appear round a corner of the drive, chugging along, with the Baroness Edouard in full driving regalia at the wheel!

At that time, people 'dressed' in the country, but I have only a faint recollection of my mother's wardrobe. For my father, however, 'dressing for the country' in no way entailed forsaking his eternal stiff high collar, the kind that is worn today only with white tie and tails. Every so often he agreed to wear a tweed jacket, and even went so far as to knot a brightly-coloured foulard of English silk round his neck; but never, even among the family, did he abandon that personal elegance which was his hallmark until the very end.

As children, we were forever discovering countless new amusements in the château itself and above all in the surrounding countryside, the grounds, the farms and the forest. Mingled together in my memory, however, are two sharply contrasting periods:

When I was very young and even during my first few years at school, Ferrières was boring, or rather, a place of constraint and obligations where we led a strictly regulated life. Before I went to the *lycée*, when we used to spend entire months there under the incessant, fussy supervision of our nannies, life seemed unbearably monotonous: at a certain time we 'had to' take a walk, at another time we 'had to' ride our bicycles or be given a

riding lesson over the same old path. The only moment of unrestrained fun was when we were taken for a drive in a cart pulled by a Shetland pony. The pony fully merited her name of 'Mighty', because I never ceased to marvel at the strength and energy of such a tiny animal. But even then, our nannies were at our side, never letting us explore a little further . . . into the forest, for example.

We were also bored by the long hours devoted to our first writing lessons. Then too, there were very few other children around, apart from the bailiff's children and the chauffeur's son. A visit from the Hottinguer children, who lived in the neighbouring château of Guermantes, was as exciting as a Christmas present.

Our daily lives were thus as predictable as clockwork, and when by chance something unforeseen interrupted our over-organized days, it was a rare treat – for example, during the terrible winter of 1917 when the lake froze over and we were allowed to go ice-skating! Nelly, my faithful bulldog who never left my side, followed me onto the frozen lake. She was an ungainly creature, yet somehow I'd managed to teach her certain tricks, like jumping fences on command and walking on top of them as on a tightrope. In spite of her strange eyes (one was brown, the other blue), she had a sweet expression. She huffed and puffed after me on the ice, sometimes falling at the same time I did. Or she'd start off at a fast clip, and I'd shout the order to 'sit', whereupon she'd slide along on her rump with a look of utter astonishment on her face. Another gala moment occurred one windy day when my nanny reluctantly let me go rowing on the lake. With a large napkin fastened to a makeshift mast, I invented a sailing boat.

When I was ten, I began attending a *lycée* in Paris and didn't get to Ferrières until late on Saturday afternoon. But soon we were old enough to participate a bit in the adult activities, and from then on Ferrières became a veritable paradise. It meant sharing for twenty-four hours the grown-up world, their fabulous shoots, their life of luxury. It was like Alice crossing the frontier into Wonderland. Sometimes, when our sacred schedules would permit, we were even allowed to dine with the adults!

My father bought me a child's gun when I was very young and turned me over to his gamekeeper for lessons; soon he let me follow the shoot and accompany him on the golf course (although it was really my mother who tried to teach me the rudiments of the famous 'swing').

Life now had quite a different flavour. Even the things that used to bore us to tears, in particular those obligatory walks, were suddenly transformed into a series of fabulous adventures, now that we were allowed to accompany our parents and their friends.

Right next to the château there were two large adjoining enclosures

known as the 'deer parks'. One of them was populated with axis deer, easily tamed animals whose light tawny coats were spotted with white stars. The gardeners kept the big boxes attached to the wire fences filled with chestnuts, and we loved to feed them because they would rush over to us and even try to climb the fence, like dogs. The other enclosure contained the ordinary deer, who were much wilder and would hide in their magnificent log cabins the moment anyone came near.

In the middle of a clearing on the far side of the lake was the *faisanderie*, the pheasant preserve. Despite its name, it was not a breeding place for pheasants but a sort of zoo, with all kinds of birds as well as some surprising species of animals. Wide avenues of aviaries arranged in a T-formation contained different varieties of blue and green parrots, male and female, all sorts of exotic birds, crowned cranes from the Cape, golden pheasants and even several monkeys. The zoo keeper, who lived on the premises and whose sole duty was to care for these creatures, had trained one of the cranes to do a clumsy dance, by going through the motions which the bird would imitate. The result was hardly graceful, but very droll. There were also some porcupines who lived in little cages in the corner of the aviaries; whenever we visited the zoo, the keeper would try to poke them out into the open with a broomstick. They would indeed emerge, but moving backwards, grunting furiously, and bristling their quills against the intruders. I must have witnessed this scene hundreds of times without ever tiring of it.

The *faisanderie* itself, a house with its back to the forest, was small, rustic and quite charming. When the château was closed for a long time after the war, I used to enjoy spending weekends there with friends.

We also loved to visit what we called the 'kitchen garden', on the outskirts of the village. It wasn't really a garden, but an orchard with long greenhouses filled with cherry trees which produced huge dark red fruit from February on; in others, heated by a network of underground canals, strawberries were grown. We used to walk through rows of espaliered trees to reach a sort of store room called the 'fruitery', located in a corner of the head gardener's house. There we strolled among the wooden-slatted shelves, as in an old-fashioned chemist's shop with its sweetish scents, sometimes picking up an apple, a pear or some other fruit in season. Further away, behind all this, were the fields of potatoes and lettuces; but we never bothered to visit these 'boring vegetables'. (When my parents were in Paris, a cart drawn by a team of horses, and later a lorry, arrived every day from Ferrières, laden with fruit and vegetables as well as enormous canteens of spring water drawn from the lake, which provided for all of our daily household needs. We were, it seems, ecologists without realizing it!)

Next we'd visit the rose garden, then the 'florist' (like Piraeus, not a man but a place), where row after row of spacious hothouses were filled with grape-vines and orchids. We'd cast a rapid glance at the laundry, an elegant, picturesque building on the Tafarette (the little stream fed by the lake) where every day, all year long, a team of laundresses, supervised by a launderer-in-chief, washed piles of sheets and towels from Paris as well as from Ferrières – some 80,000 articles a year!

But the most exciting visit for the children was to the stables, which could house a hundred horses. This was a domain of subtle nuance, for there were three different kinds of horses.

First, the saddle horses. Their stable, an extension of the former hunting lodge, was next to the garage, where cars were parked alongside antique carriages of all sizes and styles that had formerly been used to carry the inhabitants of the château on their journeys and errands. These horses were under the charge of our riding master, a former non-commissioned officer in the Cadre Noir at Saumur, who was assisted by two grooms.

The second stable was located on a village street that bordered the grounds of the château. It was reserved for draught horses, about ten of them, which had once pulled the carts and carriages that met guests at the Ozoir-la-Ferrière and Lagny railway stations, and were still used on shooting days to draw a variety of conveyances, especially the *diligence*, a sort of omnibus whose role I'll describe later.

Finally, there were the huge workhorses: Percherons, Ardennais and Boulonnais, whose massive hindquarters were lined up the length of immense stables on the farms run by the bailiff at Ferrières and at Pontcarré. Needless to say, a visit to these farms, humming with activity, not forgetting the other animals being bred and reared there – cows, sheep, pigs – provided a marvellous incentive for walks.

When we went by the golf course, we'd sometimes stop for a moment at the 'English chalet', one of my grandfather's whimsies. This house, made entirely of wood that could be dismantled, had been the star attraction of the British pavilion at the 1889 Paris Exhibition. It was really charming; my grandfather fell in love with it and had it reconstructed at the edge of the forest. It could actually have been lived in, since the bedrooms were fully furnished, but I can't remember it serving any purpose other than sheltering us from the rain and giving us a place in which to change into our golf clothes. (Later on, when I decided to move out of the château, I considered for a moment restoring it and living in it myself; but by that time the wood had become too rotten and I finally had to have it demolished.)

The important personage at Ferrières was the bailiff. While he had nothing to do with the inside of the château, which was the responsibility

of the head butler, he ruled like a lord over the grounds, the forest and the farms. He had hundreds of people working under him, from gardeners to farmers, woodcutters and gamekeepers, coachmen and chauffeurs, laundresses and zoo keepers. English-born, Monsieur Hunter had three children who were our playmates, and in the circumstances, our only childhood friends.

The shooting season lasted from November to January, and during this time life at Ferrières seemed to revolve entirely around this one activity, even though the shoot itself took place only once a week on Sunday, but every Sunday almost without exception.

We children felt such a mixture of emotions: anticipation, excitement, the thrill of seeing so many different people, sharing such a festive atmosphere, taking part in such a strict yet colourful ritual, that the entire week seemed only one long preparation for those few action-packed hours.

From Saturday night on, I lived in a fairy-tale. With my nose pressed against a second-floor window, I impatiently awaited the arrival of the guests. From five o'clock onwards all kinds of magnificent vehicles delivered their masters, generally accompanied by their wives, a maid and a valet-loader, who in the case of the less wealthy might be the chauffeur. In the Ferrières Hunt Book, a huge volume recording the results of each shoot, day by day, drive by drive, I've come across a list of some of the regulars: the Duc d'Ayen, Monsieur Bamberger, the Comte de Breteuil, Monsieur Luzarche d'Azay, the Marquis de Paris, the Comte de la Rochefoucauld, the Prince de Beauvau-Craon.

Everyone dressed for dinner, which was followed by an evening of cards or conversation, but not too late because of the sport in store for the next day!

The day of the shoot began with a normal breakfast served in the bedrooms. The pastry cooks and the 'still-room maid' spared no pains in concocting all sorts of croissants, brioches, cakes and buns, but this copious breakfast was merely a wakening snack.

At ten thirty, the hunters gathered in the salons for lunch – not a simple light refreshment, but a full-course meal, with a selection of entrées, hot and cold meats, and the usual profusion of dishes. Thus fortified, everyone went downstairs to the Hunt Room to change – competition in elegance was keen! – while the loaders came and went, helping their masters, checking their supply of cartridges one last time.

Now came the moment to leave for the shoot. First to set out was a horse-drawn charabanc, a sort of covered wagon filled with gamekeepers and personal loaders assigned to each guest. About half an hour later, the hunters, or 'guns', climbed into the *diligence*, the old omnibus pulled by

three magnificent coach horses, driven by a coachman in full dress. (When my father went shooting alone, and later with me, we rode in a charming little yellow carriage with curtains, but we were entitled to only one horse.)

The carriage moved off, the horses broke into a trot in the direction of the dark forest, and thus everyone arrived at the rendezvous spot, which was sometimes quite distant from the château.

The forest was divided into four shooting sectors: Hermières, Pontcarré, le Parc and Croissy – vast areas, each one the responsibility of a keeper who lived there and devoted his time to breeding, rearing and feeding the game, protecting it from marauding animals and poachers, all year long. Each shoot was in a different sector, with the corresponding keeper taking charge of organizing the day's sport and leading the drives. Only these four keepers, under the command of the head keeper, were entitled to wear the family colours: a blue uniform with yellow buttons and a blue velvet cap. The other keepers were dressed in ordinary brown woollen or velvet suits, each outfit indicating the exact role of the wearer in the complicated hierarchy, with its head keepers, assistant-keepers, auxiliary-keepers, etc.

There were four drives per shoot. My father assigned positions to each guest, then took his place at the end of the line, an unrewarding spot because it involved dealing with the 'runaways', those clever, experienced birds who flew off at a tangent and were much more difficult to shoot. When I was a beginner, I stayed beside my father; later he entrusted me with blocking the other end of the line. When everyone was in position, with his loader or a keeper behind him holding his two guns, my father signalled to the head keeper, who sounded the call. When the reply came back from the beaters, the shoot was on.

First cries, first beating of wings, and the first birds soon arrived and tried to cross the line. About half an hour later, the beaters closed in and the shoot reached its climax. Hundreds of pheasants in ordered ranks took flight in a flurry of feathers. The guns didn't know where to shoot first; the loaders could hardly reload fast enough; the gun barrels burned our fingers; the stricken birds seemed to explode in sprays of feathers, tracing strange trajectories before falling all around us with a dull thud. The air seemed to tremble and echo like the thunder of war, with barrages of explosions filling the sky. The excitement was at its peak. Soon we heard the cries of the approaching keepers and beaters, flushing out the last hidden birds. It was over. But I still needed several long moments to calm the pounding of my heart.

At this point the 'dog man' entered on the scene, a Scotsman, a specialist in labradors and retrievers, who had been brought over with his family to become a resident member of the staff at Ferrières. He took off

with his pack and all the keepers to pick up the dead birds. A strange silence settled over us, almost disquieting so soon after the fusillade, while the bag was collected and lined up in long rows, each drive generally producing a tableau of two or three hundred birds. (Leafing through the Hunt Book, I noticed that in one afternoon with my father, in September 1933, the two of us killed 27 partridge.)

There was a break after the second drive to catch our breath – or, more exactly, to have a drink of wine, hot bouillon, or a snack, brought by a little horse-drawn cart. This was the moment when the ladies usually arrived to watch the end of the shoot, each one choosing her 'hero' and boasting of his prowess! When I was seven or eight, I used to come with my mother, dressed in my own hunting outfit: tweed breeches tied below the knee, which the English call 'plus-fours' because the overhang measured exactly four inches. When I'd reached the age of ten or so, I was permitted to start off with the shooting party in the morning; then, at about the age of twelve, I finally graduated to the actual firing of a 28-bore gun, but always at my father's side so that he could keep an eye on me and calm me down when I became clumsy from excitement.

Then there were the hare hunts. On those days, the coach brought the guns, more of them this time, as many as fourteen, to the edge of the large Ferrières plain, then to the smaller one at Pontcarré, both enclosed by wire fencing on which coloured rags had been tied. We spread out in a line, about thirty metres apart, with the beaters in between. Then we started to walk, raking the entire width of the field towards the other end, where another line of beaters formed a barrage. But before reaching the far side of the field, we stopped; and the beaters then advanced towards us, driving back the hare and rabbit that had escaped the massacre. There were three consecutive drives, exhausting because we covered miles, sinking into the heavy soil of the ploughed field, and I was really weary at the end. But the effort was rewarded: we'd bag about six hundred hare in one day!

These shoots began earlier than the others, and we'd stop for lunch in the field – a hearty meal, because we'd done a lot of walking, served under a tent set up for the occasion. It was such an elegant tent in shape and colour that it reminded me of the famous 'Cloth of Gold' encounter between François I and Henry VIII, or of an army of another era marching on Paris.

Although it was tiring, I preferred this hunt to any other. I shot a little better, but I still fired my two shots almost simultaneously, unable to control my impatience.

Afterwards, everyone could tell if the day had been a success or not by observing my father during the drive back to the château. To him the shoot was sacred, and he was furious (but tried to conceal it) if he thought that anything had been less than perfect, if the birds had been too few or if

they'd flown badly.

Every detail of the day was discussed, reliving the highlights. The good shots, with a vaguely absent air, feigned indifference, while the less adroit seemed to hang their heads, as if in shame.

Back at the château, we changed our clothes for the next meal: once again, an abundance of various meats, cheese, pastries of all kinds, hot chocolate. All this before tackling for the final time a lighter dinner served at nine o'clock. How we managed to eat so much in a single day is still a complete mystery to me.

In the meantime, everyone went outside to cast a conqueror's eye on the display of bag which was laid out on the lawn and lit by torches held in outstretched arms by the four head keepers, to the sound of hunting horns.

After dinner, the guests departed one after the other, with their share of the game packed in a large hamper. Only a few of them spent the night in the château.

If the Sunday shoot was the high point of the week at Ferrières, Christmas was the climax of the season. It started on the afternoon of the 24th. A vast space was cleared in the orangery, which sheltered the palms and other delicate trees throughout the winter, and rows of benches were installed. In the centre stood the Christmas tree, all lit up and sprinkled with artificial snow. The village band played fanfares as my parents entered, followed by their three children.

We stood in a line, surrounded by the gamekeepers in full uniform, facing the benches filled with the children from Pontcarré, Bussy-Saint-Martin, Bussy-Saint-Georges and other villages, excited but well behaved because their parents kept an eye on them. A delegation from each school then recited greetings to my father and mother, and at last the toys and presents were distributed, along with a chocolate bar and an orange, in respect of some forgotten tradition. As soon as we were old enough, my parents turned over this responsibility to us, which made us feel very important. Finally, my father gave a little speech of Christmas greetings to enthusiastic applause, and then everybody left, first the young mothers with their babies in their arms, again in respect of some tradition.

That evening, another long wait began. As in all French homes, Father Christmas was supposed to come down the chimney, with his sleigh and reindeer and his magic sack; but at Ferrières, I don't know why, he left by the window. Before going to bed, we looked inside our shoes, neatly lined up in the fireplace next to the red cardboard boots, and I already imagined them filled with dazzling and mysterious objects.

The first thing I saw the next morning was the shiny wrappings. But I had to wait, dying of curiosity and impatience, until someone came to

open my door and give me permission to tear open these packages filled with heaps of happiness, beribboned surprises and miracles.

The fête continued throughout the afternoon, with the Christmas party of our parents and their friends in front of the Christmas tree set up in the 'white drawing-room', with yet another gift for us, this time our parents' 'official' present. Even for the Rothschilds, Santa Claus was not a member of the family!

Our toys were not particularly sophisticated, certainly nothing to compare with the modern electronic and remote-controlled ones. And nothing at all like the miniature motor car that André Citroën had built for his son a few years later. I can remember a rocking horse, which went on rocking courageously for many happy years in a corner of the basement; an electric train, set up in the *salon des cuirs*; a ping-pong table; my first gun. I also recall our little 'toad', a shallow box on four feet in the shape of a flattened frog, the object of the game being to toss metal counters into its open mouth.

For a long time I willingly went to bed early on Christmas Eve; Santa Claus would come before the night was over.

But the holidays soon came to an end. After the final shoot in January, we returned to Paris, and the most boring period of the year began. I felt as if it was going to be cold, dark, rainy and depressing for months; I felt as if I was returning to prison.

But there was no question of our going to Ferrières except for those three months. And so, in closing its gates behind us, the château also locked away for another year its treasure of fêtes and happiness.

As we grew older, my sisters and I became increasingly sensitive to the melancholy atmosphere that pervaded Ferrières, a sort of sad charm that emanated from the forest. And our affection for it grew stronger, just as we did. Today I rediscover the same feelings, like wreckage stranded on the beaches of my memory.

Even before the dramas of the war, even before there was any question of closing the château, it took me a long time before I was able to return to Ferrières and walk through its mysterious basements without being engulfed in a flood of memories and sweet nostalgia that awakened from the depths of my heart my childhood dreams and vagaries.

Why should I have become so attached to this particular place? As children, we'd known other homes. We used to spend the summer holiday in the family manor at Chantilly, next to the stables where the racehorses were trained. There we led a much more normal life, with friends our own age at last, and tennis all day long. There was also our house in Paris, where we'd spend the nine months of the school year as soon as we were old

enough to enter the *lycée*. And yet it is Ferrières which, for my sisters and myself, remains closest to our hearts.

Could it be that pleasure and happiness always began for me the moment I left Paris? But then, why not Chantilly, where we always had such fun?

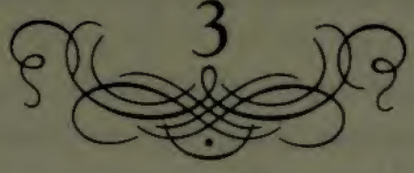
Ferrières was certainly a world unto itself, an isolated enclosure where we lived a full life: only at Ferrières can I remember being sick, experiencing childish fears renewed each night, and suffering as only children can. It was perhaps not exactly the *Grand Meaulnes* with mists and clouds, châteaux and magic balls, dark forests in which one lost one's way. Ferrières was like an ocean liner in the forest. Immobile, but nevertheless an invitation to adventure. Its only openings led into the boundless forest; and this domain, to which I was so long refused the key, never lost its powers of enchantment.

The château itself was almost like an echo of the forest. Its dark basements were like a forest glade; its endless corridors that ran around the hall were like woodland paths; its staircase where the wounded boar lay nightly in wait for me . . .

And so at dusk I was often overcome by a disturbing feeling, halfway between anxiety and sadness. The lake with its shifting mists, the blanket of fog that sometimes hovered all day long, were not the only reasons for it. The dense forest, its secret denizens, its hidden mysteries . . . it must have been lurking there, whatever it was that came to wring my heart. And almost every evening at twilight, the same pheasant would perch on the same tree and utter his mournful cry, as if to mock me. Why should this call from the direction of the Italian gallery remain so vivid, to the point where I can still see that little boy watching the approach of night from his bedroom window?

Then from the depths of my memory, even today, arises an entire procession of shadows from my childhood. The old nostalgia is rather unsettling; memories of the château flow back to me from the distant past, and my ageing bones are shaken by an uncontrollable tremor of sadness and of tenderness.

CHAPTER



Nanny, Let Me Go . . .

My parents' residence in Paris was called 'the rue Saint-Florentin'. Built by the Comte de Saint-Florentin, one of Louis XVI's ministers, at the corner of the rue de Rivoli and the Place de la Concorde, this imposing mansion, now the American consulate, was several storeys high and consisted of two main wings joined together by a central reception area at the far end of a paved courtyard.

According to an article in *l'Art* in 1905, it was 'conceived according to the simple but spacious designs of the 18th century, when architects had not yet begun their epic battle against light and air from which they emerged victorious . . . (It was) a remarkable building more because of its immensity than its ostentation.' Yet it had been nobly inhabited. For years it was the private palace of Talleyrand, 'the lame devil', and visitors were still shown the room that Tsar Alexander I had chosen for himself in 1815.

From my own bedroom on the top floor, there was a magnificent view that swept across the Place de la Concorde, alive with pedestrians and horses, cars and carriages; in almost a straight line beyond the Obelisk, I could see the Eiffel Tower; and rising above the rooftops on the other side of the Seine, there was a giant Ferris wheel which carried passengers in little open cabins. (This fascinating contraption was, to my dismay, demolished at the end of World War I.)

Every morning, a procession of elegant, identical carriages, drawn by handsome horses with drivers wearing stiff cowhide top hats, passed beneath my window; they were delivering orders from the Louvre department store all over Paris. At that early hour, the street was already crowded with carriages, with the first private cars, and the Renault taxis which were to become famous as the 'taxis of the Marne', with their curious sloping bonnets and leather roofs that could be folded back in good weather. From my window, I witnessed many a colourful scene, full of suspense, when the heavy horses that pulled the ice wagons, laden with big rectangular blocks of ice which the coachmen delivered to private homes, often carrying them on their backs up numerous flights of stairs, lost their

footing in winter on the slippery wooden paving blocks. I could hear the drivers' curses and observe their strange gesticulations as they tried to urge the horses onto their feet again.

Inside the house, a multitude of servants scurried in all directions, bustling about (and sometimes loitering) on every floor. My parents were not the only ones to maintain such a large staff, for domestic service was still one of the major sources of employment in France in the early 1900s. When they went out in the evening, a liveried butler always waited up for them, no matter how late, in order to accompany them to their rooms or serve them a drink; a chambermaid always helped my mother undress and go to bed.

Between the servants and the children, there was a kind of complicity. I remember the sweet smile of Madame Edouard, the linen-maid, whose company I often sought during my playtime hours. And I can still see Marie and Jules, the *concierges* – or rather, hear them, since Marie, who answered the telephone, used to literally yelp as she rushed from one line to another, while the two dogs my mother had given her and who shared her *loge* (Spad, a German shepherd, and Tank, a pomeranian) yapped in unison. It was bedlam day and night. Jules, very dignified in his blue and yellow livery, spent his time opening and closing the heavy carriage gates whenever he heard three toots on the horn demanding entrance.

One day, one of the servants inveigled me into believing that I was gifted with almost supernatural powers; while I was amusing myself by playing my bugle, he claimed to have seen a regiment of soldiers parading down the street, obviously in response to my battle call!

But now I'm slipping into idle memories. In this book, born of my regrets and hopes, why should I too begin conventionally with a description of my childhood? Ferrières, with its enchanted shadows and the poetry of its vanished world, deserves to be recalled. But the rest, as will be seen, was not a part of that fairy-tale universe. I thought it over for a long time. My childhood was not unlike that of many other 'privileged sons'. I had nannies, like some; the *lycée*, like everyone; the university, as was fitting; and military service, like all good citizens. Nothing fairy-tale in all that! However, since the adult is already wholly present in the child, I finally decided that, like it or not, I ought to revive for a moment those crucial early years.

The recollection of my schooldays does not really interest me as such. But . . . why did the *lycée*, which my parents felt would teach me to be 'like everyone else', merely convince me that I was different? Why was my military service, on the other hand, such an easy experience, why did it seem to provide the solution I was seeking to my problems? Why and how did my mother, who adored my sisters and me, burden us with her own

anxieties? These questions are not meant to settle old scores. But they allow me to contemplate with the detachment of age some of the paradoxes involved in bringing up children, to re-evaluate the education I have given my own sons, and to find out why the adult we finally become carries on throughout his life an unspoken, eternal dialogue with his father and mother.

My father, Edouard de Rothschild, was sixteen years older than my mother. Tall and slender, with finely-chiselled features and an aquiline nose, the most striking thing about him was undoubtedly his highly personal form of elegance. It wasn't merely a matter of dress, like the stiff collars he almost always wore except when he was playing golf or shooting. Although his style was almost indefinable, neither old-fashioned nor pretentious, a vague idea can be conveyed by describing it as a curious blend of originality, simplicity and tradition, which all together created a certain *chic* that was very personal and not in the least ridiculous, conventional, nor even formal. Out of respect for the past, he continued to preside over the annual meeting of the Compagnie du Nord in an ancient frock-coat such as nobody had worn since the end of the 19th century!

He also clung to certain habits, quite natural to him, but which, to those who did not know him, might have given the impression that he wished to attract attention. Until the 1930s, for example, he was the only person to drive around Paris in an old electric car, a prehistoric monster which looked like a large carriage, but without the horse in front.

He was already forty-one years old when I was born, which made me feel far more than a generation apart. He must have suffered as a child from a lack of maternal love and an excess of paternal authority. His sister Bettina, fifteen years his senior, gave him the only real maternal warmth he'd known, and when she married and moved to the Avenue du Bois, he used to visit her every day, walking all the way from the Place de la Concorde. He admired and adored his father beyond measure. In fact, his hero-worship became such an integral part of his personality that it excluded all critical judgement; even thirty or forty years after his father's death, he still revered his teachings as sacred writ. He must have had to overcome many problems within himself, which is no doubt why he was always rather reserved, even with those closest to him, never completely revealing the very sensitive side of his nature.

One of his outstanding traits was the unusual ability to involve himself personally in everything. For example, if he happened to mention Napoleon I, whom he greatly admired, he would suddenly say, as naturally as could be, 'Napoleon once told me that . . . ' – Napoleon having died, of course, almost fifty years before my father was born!

When Russia joined our side during World War II, my father, who could never have been called a 'leftist', discovered overnight all sorts of splendid qualities in our new ally, including that of democratic freedom. Notwithstanding his lively, sharp intelligence, he tended to see things as he wanted them to be, for better or for worse. Moreover, he always viewed things with reference to the past.

There was nothing affected about him. A genuinely modest man, he never talked about himself. Unfailingly patient, understanding and generous, he was very affectionate towards his wife and children. He couldn't do enough to please us. He introduced us to riding, golf, shooting, and later on tried to get us to share his passion for horseracing.

When serious matters were involved, such as the family reputation, the protection of the interests for which he was responsible, or the fight against anti-semitism, he displayed innate dignity; his sense of honour was intrinsic and unconditional. Once or twice, feeling insulted by some anti-semitic remark, he'd even fought a duel, fortunately without serious consequences.

Always attentive and thoughtful towards his friends and family, my father was cordial but never intimate. Thin and nervous, he was quite temperamental and could fly into a rage over trifles, although he was seldom angry with us.

He had his little eccentricities, especially at home. For example, endowed with a very sensitive palate, he was fussy about his food. He would often hold up his plate to the butler with an outraged air, indignantly declaring, 'This mutton smells of wool!' or 'This fish reeks of fish!' and then add, 'Can't you bring me something that is at least edible? An egg, perhaps?'

He did not care a whit about appearances or what people thought of him. Towards the end of his life, he used to go all by himself in summer to Ciro's, the most elegant restaurant in Deauville, carrying under his arm a little box containing his personal provision of homemade cream cheese and *crème fraîche*.

For years he played golf either at Chantilly or on his private links at Ferrières designed by Simpson, the most famous golf course designer of the day. My mother used to join him. She had an elegant swing which was also remarkably ineffectual; my father's style consisted of hopping stiffly up and down with a jerky motion, his tongue stuck in his right cheek. After each game, they would firmly announce that the secret of this diabolical sport was . . . one day in the wrists, another in the arms, and sometimes in the entire body. They were obviously genuine golfers!

My father also loved to play cards. Every day after the office (at home we never called it 'the bank'), he went to the Nouveau Cercle on the

Boulevard Saint-Germain for a game of bridge. I remember one rather farcical incident when he had to be interrupted in the middle of a hand. It seems that my sister Jacqueline's first husband shot himself in the chest after a quarrel and, believing himself to be on the verge of death, collapsed on my mother's bed – which was already occupied by my mother! It turned out that he had only pierced the jacket, but my father dashed across the Place de la Concorde, arriving home completely out of breath. The entire tragi-comic scene made a great impression on me.

During the latter years of his life, my father used to receive certain telephone calls at the 'office', which were obviously not from the President of France. He would answer them in my presence, not in the least embarrassed, but using such evasive language punctuated by such mischievous smiles, that they were clearly not business conversations. I suppose that certain girlfriends from his younger days, knowing how kind-hearted he was, were appealing to his generosity.

I was never curious to know exactly what his role was at the bank in the rue Laffitte, any more than I had the faintest idea what went on there. Come to think of it, this total lack of information should have aroused my suspicions, because if there was anything to tell, we would have heard about it, if only in snatches. In any case, when I started to work in the bank after my military service, it came as a revelation to discover an aspect of my father quite different from the one we saw at home. He often lost his temper with his staff, although their subservience was total, their lack of initiative reassuring, and their goodwill boundless. In spite of their docility, he seemed to be afraid that some detail might escape his attention, an error slip by somewhere, to the permanent detriment of the 'family business'. This attitude of his certainly reflected an internal combat between the need for action and the fear of making a mistake. It made me feel uncomfortable and a bit embarrassed for him, and I resolved to rely more on my own resources.

In our personal relationship, he was always the same, affectionate and smiling at the office as at home. And so I learned to live with his dual personality: highly-strung businessman at the office; kindly, generous father at home.

After the cyclonic campaign of 1940 which led to the capitulation of France, we met again in the United States. I found him old and ill; there was no longer any point in brooding over past failings. As intransigent as ever in his hide-bound ideas about business, he became increasingly absent-minded and prone to daydreaming, and after his return to France he had to contend with all the ailments of old age. He died in 1949 , when he was eighty-one.

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My mother, Germaine Halphen, came from a good French Jewish family. Her father died when I was a little child, and all I know is that their Jewishness never bothered either him or his wife. Intensely patriotic, they were generally hostile to foreign ideas and people.

My grandmother, a rather domineering widow with great strength of character, suddenly discovered a passion for painting and spent hours every day in front of her easel. She also held a literary salon where, every Saturday afternoon, she 'received' famous authors, proudly believing (and convincing others) that her salon was one of the steps on the way to the Académie Française.

I usually spent a week or so in July at her house in Ville d'Avray, which was surrounded by a large garden overlooking Paris and filled with a continual stream of artists and intellectuals. I remember in particular Anna de Noailles, the poetess, who seemed to have a weakness for young men; and Paul Valéry, who was an extraordinary mixture of kindness and mordant wit.

My grandmother refused to leave France during World War II, preferring to live in hiding and in poverty throughout the Occupation, which she endured with admirable fortitude. She died only three months after the Liberation.

My mother was *petite*, smaller than she seemed to be, even though she was slightly round-shouldered and became more so with age. Brown-haired and black-eyed, she might easily have grown stout if she had not adhered to a strict diet. She was a pretty woman with soft, harmonious features. Unlike my father, she was very down-to-earth, devoid of fantasy. She saw life from a practical point of view and ran her household with a tight rein.

Far more than my father, it was she who took charge of our education, in that she scrupulously organized everything concerning our health, our daily programmes, our leisure activities. She also assumed the responsibility for teaching us good manners, from elementary etiquette to the most subtle forms of courtesy. Her basic principle was that we should never be boastful or pretentious. How often I heard her say, 'You've got to make up for having more than other people' – a dictum I have tried to drum into my own children. And if they remember only one piece of advice from me, I hope it will be this one.

In a book of recommendations to a young Frenchman setting forth for England, André Maurois used as an example Alain Gerbault, who had just completed his famous solitary voyage around the world in a small boat. If ever he were asked if he knew how to sail, Gerbault was advised to answer: 'I've done a little rowing.' Enchanted by this reply, my mother often quoted it to me.

She was a great admirer of English manners and comportment, and especially of the British style of elegance typified by those highly cultured, gifted individuals who hide their erudition and talents behind a façade of nonchalance and understatement. 'When an Englishman is good,' she used to say, 'he's better than anyone else.'

For my sisters and myself, parental authority was thus vested in my mother, while my father seemed more like a loving, slightly absent-minded visitor. Basically, my mother enjoyed dominating and imposing her opinions on us, but she screened her taste for power behind an incessant self-censorship of her words and moods. The overt expression of her authority or disapproval was an oppressive, accusing silence, which had the insidious effect of upsetting us far more than any open confrontation would have done.

Once I'd passed the milestone of my eighteenth birthday and was accepted as an independent adult, I found it easy to develop a harmonious relationship with my mother; but my sisters suffered throughout their lives from the anxiety that marked her attitude towards them. While she worried about them, she also subconsciously tried to realize through them what fate had failed to give to her: a life more carefree, less restrictive, perhaps, more surrounded by artists and musicians.

As a matter of fact, during the thirties there was no shortage of artists and especially of musicians, in my mother's entourage. Alfred Cortot, Jascha Heifetz, Yehudi Menuhin, Vladimir Horowitz and his wife, Wanda Toscanini, all came often to our house. Arthur Rubinstein became a close friend of the family. A dashing young man who lived on the rue Ravignan in Montmartre, he seemed destined for eternal bachelorhood, until he returned from Poland one fine day with his beautiful bride, Nela. Later on, their children visited my mother regularly, and only recently Marie-Hélène and I were vastly amused by the string of stories that Arthur could draw from his inexhaustible supply and recount with the same humour and colourful detail, the same enthusiasm, until the end of his life.

My mother scrupulously fulfilled all of the social obligations that went with her position: she wrote letters and replied to them, made up lists, sent out invitations, entertained guests, attended social events. For so cultured a person who was not at all superficial but, on the contrary, conscious and admiring of moral and intellectual qualities, she was surprisingly attached to her role in society. She entertained with elegance in the flattering setting of the family art collections, of which she was very proud (although she never let it show).

If she ever felt that her role of Queen Mother was threatened, or even that it might be, she could then become quite aggressive. When Marie-Hélène and I gave our first big party after reopening Ferrières, I could

overhear her muttering, between polite smiles, critical remarks about the restoration that had been completed without consulting her. Everything that escaped her personal control aroused her innate desire to dominate, although she immediately suppressed any outward sign of it. But these few trees don't make a forest; her bad moods were intense but infrequent.

My mother was a virtuous woman with a generous heart. Mindful of her obligations, she considered it only natural to help others. Throughout her life she employed a social worker who investigated needy cases and advised her in finding ways to aid them. Every Thursday, she visited the Rothschild Foundation's children's home in Nogent-sur-Marne, distributing gifts and playing with the children, who smothered her with hugs and kisses and called her 'Germaine'.

Although she was not exactly what one might term an 'intellectual', she was nonetheless receptive to all sorts of ideas. A perennial student, serious and conscientious, she adopted 'gurus' in various fields, such as philosophy, painting and music, promptly relinquishing her own critical faculties and accepting their teachings as gospel. She loved learning new things. In her youth, she'd studied singing for a while, without success; at eighty, she decided to take swimming lessons! She was an avid reader, especially after my father's death when she was often alone, and particularly enjoyed the classics and works on child psychology. She herself wrote two books: one on the life of Bernard Palissy, the 16th-century scholar and ceramist, illustrated with photographs of the finest pieces from my father's collection; and the other, at the urging of her son-in-law, Gregor Piatigorsky, a biography of the Italian composer, Luigi Boccherini.

Loved and respected for her elegant manners, her loyal generosity and irreproachable behaviour, this great lady died at the age of ninety-one, after four years of illness. I owe her far more than these few pages.

My two sisters are younger than I. The elder, Jacqueline, has dark hair, while Bethsabée is blonde. Jacqueline was born ten months after our brother Alphonse died at the age of four from complications following an appendectomy, and my mother's grief while she was carrying Jacqueline may account for the fact that she was a melancholy child.

She was pretty, but neither flirtatious nor very sociable. Her marriage, when she was far too young, ended in divorce. She found consolation in her piano lessons, even aspiring to a professional career. Although she never achieved that ambition, in spite of lessons from Alfred Cortot, whom she idolized, her musical efforts were rewarded in another way. She met the famous cellist Gregor Piatigorsky and married him just before the war. They lived happily together for nearly forty years, until he died of lung cancer. (Alas, he smoked.)

Grisha, as we called him, was a big fellow with a thick Russian accent. Having lost his family in his native land, we became his new one. He called my mother 'Baboushka', a nickname which my children immediately adopted for her too. They adored each other. Unlike most great performers, Piatigorsky was neither conceited nor egocentric; he never talked about himself, his concerts, or his art – or if he did it was in a jocular way. Always cheerful and smiling, he loved life, and his death was a great loss to the entire family.

Having decided to live in America, he and Jacqueline finally settled in Los Angeles. My sister still lives there, as intense and serious, as earnest and assiduous in her work as ever, succeeding in everything she undertakes. Now it is sculpture; and before it was chess, in which she reached the level of international competition.

Bethsabée, the intellectual of the family, pursued advanced studies in biology. As serious as her sister, equally disinterested in society and frivolities, she married without passion and divorced after giving birth to a still-born baby. Probably as a consequence of her unhappy marriage and the death of her child, she lost interest in biology and developed a passion for dance, not as a performer, but as a patroness. She was a long-standing admirer and friend of Martha Graham. Today, at her home in Tel Aviv, she divides her time between promoting craftsmen, whose work she exports, and managing her own ballet company, the Bat Dor, which is her pride and joy and *raison d'être*.

Both of my sisters thus seem to have reacted to certain aspects of our upbringing with the same spirit of rebellion. Our parents' overprotectiveness became intolerable to them; they developed a veritable allergy to luxury, to a profusion of servants, in short, to everything that reminded them of our childhood. They chose to live very private lives, beyond the reach of family influence, and to keep their distance.

I have few memories of World War I. When the fighting broke out, my father sent us all to England, where my sister Bethsabée was born in September 1914. It was the second time that England served as a place of refuge for my father; in 1870, when he was two years old, his own father had sent him to stay with his English grandparents during the Franco-Prussian war.

When the hostilities seemed to reach a stalemate, we returned to France; and when, during the second battle of the Marne, a German invasion of Paris seemed likely we fled south to Château-Lafite.

I remember clearly the nannies assigned to look after us then. All of them were English, boring and strict. There were three of them to start with, one for each of us, but soon there was only one – English, needless to

say, and seconded by an assistant. For a while they both wore those nurse's uniforms such as are still seen in old films, before reverting, so to speak, to 'civilian' clothes.

While there was a change in number and in outward aspect, their mental attitude unfortunately remained the same. I remember them as veritable dragons, dim-witted sergeants who insisted on the strictest discipline and refused to tolerate the slightest caprice. My nanny ruled tyrannically over three domains: my body, my stomach, and my mind. Every day I had to take a walk at a certain time, 'for exercise', perform the meticulous ritual of afternoon tea, and spend endless hours with my schoolbooks. Our walks led either to the Tuileries gardens or to the leafy clump of trees at the beginning of the Champs-Elysées. At 'five o'clock' tea (which, of course, took place at four o'clock sharp), I had to swallow a bowl of milk along with bread and butter, although I had no appetite. One day, a wasp hidden in the marmalade stung my lip, and forever after, tea-time was a nightmare for me.

Never for an instant was this discipline relaxed. My mother told me later, with a wry smile, that when we were escaping to Bordeaux by car, the nannies insisted on stopping every day at four o'clock for their sacrosanct tea, no matter where we happened to be.

Even on the beach at Arcachon, my nanny made no distinction between fun and exercise and never let me relax for a minute, nervously ordering me to 'Dig! Dig!' whenever my activity seemed to wane. My playmates finally took to calling her 'Miss Dig-dig', a name she'd certainly earned. It's not surprising that these indomitable nannies forged the character of a nation which neither Napoleon nor Hitler succeeded in conquering!

Their strictness in our case had at least one valid excuse; my brother Alphonse's nanny had never reported the fact that he vomited every meal, and she was held responsible for his death. This tragedy which, I now realize, marked my parents' entire lives, created a veritable 'appendicitis complex' in the family, and the operation itself seemed jinxed. My sisters and I all had to undergo it, in my case during World War I when I was only six. Again, it was an emergency operation, performed in my mother's bathroom; again, my nanny had never mentioned the nausea I felt at every meal, and she too was fired and forgotten. This critical intervention almost cost me my life. Because the fever failed to subside, there had to be a second operation to insert a drain, and everybody feared the worst.

'He's still alive,' reported the surgeon, 'and if he can sleep through the next two hours, he'll survive.'

My mother had had an appendectomy as a child, but my father

underwent the accursed operation when he was almost fifty. Due to the unpleasant memory of a previous operation on his knee, during which the anaesthetic was only partially effective, leaving him conscious but paralysed and in great anguish throughout, he insisted this time on having a local anaesthetic. What courage! (But how unnecessary . . .) After my father's ordeal, it was the turn of one of our nannies, and then of my first girlfriend. All of this probably explains why my mother, traumatized by the death of her eldest son, insisted on such strict discipline and especially on regular daily exercise for the rest of us.

My nanny's only merit in my eyes, apart from her devotion, was the fact that, thanks to her, I learned to speak English before I spoke French. My father, whose mother was English, also talked to me in that language, so that when I finally learned to speak French, I felt as if I had graduated to an aristocratic foreign tongue, and considered it a sort of reward.

Imprisoned in this strictly ordered system, I was overjoyed to learn that I would go to school in a Parisian *lycée*.

It may seem strange that, at a time when class distinctions were more pronounced than they are today and were accepted as perfectly 'natural', my parents did not choose to give me the advantages of a more élite education by sending me to some famous private school. My father wanted me to live the life of an average French child and avoid the dangers of an exclusive education which might turn me into a typical 'spoiled brat'. He himself had had an ordinary education – *lycée* and military service – and, respectful of tradition above all else, he expected his son to receive the same education that he had had.

I was not, however, given the normal freedom of an ordinary schoolboy. My mother decreed that I was never to go to school unaccompanied; not only was I to be driven to school by the chauffeur, but there would be a footman at my side for further protection. When I went home for lunch – that indispensable daily walk! – the same footman came to pick me up and walked back with me afterwards. It was only many years later that my mother gave me the key to this strange obsession of hers, and the irrational anxiety behind it.

'Whatever were you so afraid of?' I asked her.

'I suppose,' she replied with blushing candour, 'I was afraid you might be raped!'

I remember another of my mother's remarks, undoubtedly inspired by the same anxiety. It occurred when I was about ten or twelve years old and went alone one day to the skating rink.

'Are you sure you didn't speak to any ladies? You know, they might not realize that you are just a little boy!'

My dear mother unwittingly did me great disservice in this respect. Her over-protectiveness humiliated me in front of my friends, and after a while I asked the chauffeur to stop and let me out a few hundred yards from the *lycée* so that my arrival would not attract attention. The psychological damage was more permanent, however, in that I lacked confidence in my ability to deal with the little problems of daily life and ended up believing that I was neither clever enough, self-sufficient nor manly enough, to cope. I had even become so imbued with a sense of restriction that one day, when nobody was there to meet me after school, all I could think of doing was to ask one of my teachers to walk me home!

Once, however, I was allowed to stay overnight with some friends near Dinard on the Brittany coast, and I came home enchanted by the experience. I'd had a wonderful time; I'd been to the cinema and a party; I was absolutely elated by it all. I don't know which item on the programme so displeased and enraged my mother, but the upshot was that my friends, considered vulgar or perhaps of dubious morality, were crossed off the list; they were, at least, attacked by such a barrage of long- and medium-range artillery that they were knocked down and out of my life forever.

The *lycée* was a good school, but my grades soon fell below average, so my parents hired a tutor for me, Roger Nathan (who later became famous as Secretary General of the Ministry for National Economy). I worshipped him like an elder brother. He built up my self-confidence, broke down my emotional defences, and enlarged my scope of interests. In particular, he introduced me to painting, and I still remember how thrilled I was when he encouraged me to buy two inexpensive watercolours, my first 'art acquisitions'.

Nevertheless, I had to repeat my fifth year, and was transferred to a new school, Louis-le-Grand, and assigned a new tutor, René Fillon, only four or five years older than me, who was preparing for a degree in literature.

I was still going home every day for lunch, but now the walk was longer and took at least three-quarters of an hour . . . and I was still accompanied! I started to study seriously. At the end of my next-to-last year, I was awarded a prize for excellence, several prizes in maths, and eventually passed the final exams of the *baccalauréat* with flying colours. René Fillon, who was by then working towards a post-graduate degree, continued to tutor me in preparing my diplomas in literature and law. We were fast friends, and after the war he became one of the managers of the bank.

My years at the *lycée*, where I was supposed to lead an ordinary life, to submit to the same discipline as the other students, to be just another one of them instead of a privileged child, only partially fulfilled my parents' expectations. As a day student, I did not participate in extracurricular

activities, partially due to lack of opportunity, but also undoubtedly because of my own timidity, withdrawal and innate lack of sociability which stifled any 'school spirit', that sense of solidarity so important in the lives of 'old boys' who have been to the same school.

While I was never ridiculed, rebuffed, ostracized or singled out (even my professors never seemed to pay much attention to me except when they needed an example of a perfect English accent), I still felt like an outsider.

My mother sometimes unintentionally caused me embarrassment: for example, by making me wear shorts when my schoolmates were already wearing long trousers; or, even worse, when she dressed me up in the British style of Norfolk jacket and knee-length breeches. I was also made to bundle up in layers of sweaters after sports, as if I were the only member of the team in danger of freezing to death. Not only did all of this make me feel ridiculous, but it also gave me what would today be called an inferiority complex.

One afternoon, for instance, I was accosted near the *lycée* by a man carrying a sandwich-board. Holding out some coins, he asked me to buy him a cigar at the corner tobacco shop, since he couldn't get through the door himself with the cumbersome advertising board harnessed to his back. I was so terrified by the idea of entering a shop and making a purchase that, ashamed and abashed, I refused the poor man's request, much to his astonishment – which I interpreted as scorn.

While accepting these restrictions, I still felt there was something unfair about them. 'They' were preventing me from proving myself; 'they' refused to let me grow up; 'they' surrounded me with barriers which I didn't dare cross. Even my graduation prize for excellence did not increase my self-assurance. I still felt that I had had a sort of built-in protective system – my tutor – without which I would never have succeeded in passing the final examinations.

At least I'd learned from the *lycée* that there was another way of life, that of ordinary people. Once, for example, I brought home from school a friend who hurt my feelings without realizing it. At that time I was fascinated by the novels of Jules Verne and the adventure stories of the famous gilt-trimmed, red leather-bound Hetzel collection, such as *Les Cinq Sous* by Lavarède, and *Les Semeurs de Glace* by Paul d'Ivoi. My friend was so impressed by the rich bindings and sumptuous illustrations that he refused my offer to lend him one of these books, afraid that he might damage it. This made me very sad, and I felt that it's not always easy to live in different worlds.

Throughout our childhood, we observed the tradition of having lunch every Wednesday with our parents in their private dining room, with no

nannies present, just the family. It was always a red-letter day.

My mother, who believed in adhering to a strict daily schedule, made us sit down at table at twelve forty-five sharp. She questioned us about our studies, our behaviour and our daily lives, never missing a detail. My father was almost invariably late for lunch. We supposed that his professional responsibilities were terribly demanding. He was always affectionate and seemed happy to see us. My mother, having fulfilled her educational obligations at the beginning of the meal, caught his mood and the atmosphere was warm and relaxed. Neither my sisters nor myself were particularly talkative, but my parents generally managed to get us to open up a bit, except when the Baron de Brimond, an old family friend, whiskered and black frock-coated, was invited to join the family luncheon party along with his granddaughter. He too was rather taciturn, which made the rest of us even less communicative than usual.

Our parents also spent the month of August with us. My father used to go to Deauville for the season, dividing his time between his stud farm and the racecourse. Now they decided to accompany us to Dieppe or Dinard, which were reputed to be healthy climates for growing children and, when we were adolescents, safer for our souls than the libertine atmosphere of more sophisticated summer resorts.

There was one place where we felt less bound by routine and discipline, solitude and boredom: Chantilly, where we spent the Easter holidays and the months of July and September.

My father had a passion for horses, the English countryside and the Middle Ages. He therefore decided to build a Gothic country house in the heart of a landscape resembling the area around Newmarket, the horse capital of England. Consulting numerous documents and taking as a model the château of Montal, a Renaissance gem in the Lot region, he built a house in the style of Viollet-le-Duc. The sculptured wood and stone, the bedrooms all facing north (summer heat was not yet fashionable), various devices that opened secret doors, all made this astonishing modern medieval manor planted in the middle of an English-style park next to the stables where our horses were trained, the only place where I really lived the life of a normal child and where our nannies' fussy supervision at last abated somewhat.

Chantilly is practically synonymous with horses, which I've loved ever since I was a little boy, first in Normandy at the Meautry stud, where the foals were born, then at Chantilly, where from my window I could see the horses training long before I learned to ride. I watched many trial runs on 'Les Aigles' (the training track) and on the racecourse itself, and admired the jockeys going to work on their little ponies which they treated like Vespas. Having reached their destination, they'd simply hop off, and the

well-trained animals would graze happily until their masters returned from their work-outs. I can still see Bellhouse, Sharpe, O'Neill, Jennings and especially McGee, the stable jockey, a sly old fox who was past master of the waiting-in-front strategy, a racing tactic that my father particularly appreciated.

Horses were one of the joys of my childhood. I learned to ride before I was five, and revelled in my Thursday promenades in the Bois de Boulogne. Our saddle horses always accompanied us wherever we went, from Ferrières to Paris, from Paris to Chantilly, and even as far as Dieppe and Dinard.

Every Thursday afternoon in Paris, my mother invited some of our friends to learn the rudiments of ballroom dancing under the supervision of Madame Desprez, with the idea of saving us from ridicule later on when we'd be old enough to go to dances. Instead of the waltz and tango, however, an American negro taught us the more fashionable foxtrot, South American dances, and a tap-danced Charleston.

My mother, who loved music, tried to turn us all into virtuosi, but with scant success. She decided that I should learn to play the cello, while one of my sisters studied the piano and the other the violin. The fatal day arrived when our trio had to give a Christmas concert for our parents and their friends. I was thirteen at the time, and my youngest sister only eight. Our timing was lamentable, and the recital turned into a race from which I emerged the winner, crossing the finish line several bars ahead of my breathless sisters.

I gave up the cello to try my hand at the mandolin, more as a plaything than as a musical instrument; and finally ended my musical career with a saxophone that my brother-in-law Piatigorsky gave me in 1938, along with the advice: 'Hurry up and learn to play it, because it may soon be your only means of earning a living!' He was right about the imminent disaster of war, but completely wrong about my musical talent. Despite a year of lessons and arduous practice, I made no progress at all. It thus turned out that neither my sisters nor I lived up to my mother's musical expectations. However, her ambitions were finally satisfied when Piatigorsky became her son-in-law, for he is universally recognized as one of the three greatest cellists of the century, along with Casals and Rostropovich.

I instinctively sought diversions from so many restrictions and prohibitions by taking up all sorts of hobbies, in particular the construction of wireless radios. Before they were mass-produced, specialized magazines published diagrams of countless combinations and connections of wires and parts, just as modern magazines give instructions for building houses

and complicated toys. Fascinated by the limitless field of possibilities, I imagined myself capable of exploring them all.

I was also a faithful subscriber to the English boys' adventure story magazines, such as the *Wide World*, with its tales of lost heroes struggling in the savage jungle, and the *Strand*, in which chaste love stories invariably ended with the boy finally kissing the blushing young girl, discovering with rapture that her lips were so marvellously 'cool'. (In Anglo-Saxon literature, it took a long time for 'flaming passion' and 'burning lips' to be accepted!)

I also tried my hand at drawing, inspired by the advertisements of an English art school, the 'ABC of Drawing', which offered a free criticism of the reproduction of the picture of a young girl's head. Not realizing that the copy was supposed to be life-size, I conscientiously sent a drawing of exactly the same dimensions as the picture in the advertisement – no more than one inch high! In reply, I was simply asked how old I was. This humiliating experience brought to an abrupt end my childish and decidedly unpromising artistic career.

Magic also appealed to me. I purchased countless books and magazines that explained how to read palms and cards, to become a ventriloquist, to analyse character from a person's facial features, or how to acquire and develop magnetism! But obviously, all of this dabbling in para-psychology could not provide what was missing in my life: the right to do the same things that my friends did.

Strange as it may seem today, being a Rothschild didn't worry me at all, for money was nothing to be ashamed of at that time. People built châteaux, bought works of art, lived extravagantly, in short, were not afraid to appear conspicuously wealthy. The rich didn't feel guilty, because nobody accused them of anything. My school friends weren't jealous of me, and my teachers gave me no special treatment. Perhaps, at about the age of fourteen or fifteen, I may have gone through a brief stage of puerile vanity, but my mother's lessons soon brought me back within the bounds of modesty.

My parents never made the kind of arrogant statements that are traditional in certain families. 'When you are a Rothschild . . . ' is a phrase I heard only much later, when I was working at the bank; and then it simply referred to our tradition of rigorous business ethics, and in fact, was more like an order to respect them.

If I was unaware of inequalities, it is because at that time, when social differences were far more clearly defined than they are today, the hierarchy was not based solely on money. During periods of relative stability, everyone instinctively found his own level. For example, 'society people' (a term which had no connotation of superficiality, as it does today) knew

that they were privileged, hoped or believed that they were 'better bred', more 'elegant', more 'refined'. And no doubt for the same reason, the Rothschild myth, based on an alliance of money, luxury and power, represented something quite different. My children have occasionally heard remarks made about them at the *lycée* and university that I myself never heard. But, to be perfectly truthful, while I may not have been conscious of belonging to a privileged world, I could obviously not remain forever ignorant of the fact. The moment inevitably arrived when I finally saw my parents as sovereigns of a small kingdom. My father's elegance, my mother's clothes and jewels, their horses and carriages, the mass of people dependent on them, at their beck and call, the general aura of luxury . . . It was indeed a world of privilege.

On my eighteenth birthday, life changed overnight from one of restriction to one of liberty. Without transition, the change was total – and totally arbitrary. The night before, I went to bed at nine o'clock as usual; the next morning, I was suddenly free to do as I pleased.

In celebration of the occasion, my parents gave a large party – which was over by midnight! At that hour it was announced that Lindbergh had just landed at Le Bourget. Everybody left the party and rushed to the airport to witness the historic event. The moment Lindbergh's plane came to a stop at the end of the runway, he was tackled by his fans, torn from the cockpit by his admirers. With dry humour, he apologized for having failed his mission because he had not taxied his plane to the parking place that had been assigned to it! The next day he was given a triumphant tour of Paris, driving past my window in an open car with Myron Herrick, the American Ambassador, at his side, cheered by a delirious crowd. Tall, lean, pale and blond, he looked like a shy college student and seemed to be singularly unimpressed by all the excitement.

Having passed the milestone of my eighteenth birthday, I entered a strange new world: the world of society. I remember my first formal dinner, with Raymond Poincaré the guest of honour, and some forty guests, as usual. Dressed in white tie and tails, I had to escort my dinner table partner into the dining room, offering her my arm. Suddenly seized with panic at the thought that I might offer the wrong arm, I recalled the 'magic formula' my mother had taught me: 'Remember that a gentleman has to keep his right arm free so that he can draw his sword in defence of a helpless lady.' As the former President of France escorted my 'helpless' mother into the dining room, she murmured in my ear, 'I wish I were somewhere else.' Yet she was far from shy!

Looking over some of the menus of those dinner parties, I can hardly believe my eyes. We started with two soups, the first a clear consommé and

the second a creamy bisque; an egg or fish course; then game – partridge, pheasant or hare, followed by a roast accompanied by several sauces and vegetables; next, cold meats and salad, after which came two desserts, and finally cheese and fruit. An abundance of wine was served throughout the meal: reds and whites, bordeaux and burgundies, champagne, sweet wines, not to mention a variety of liqueurs.

My daily life also changed. Having passed the second part of my *baccalauréat*, a decision now had to be made as to my university education. Business administration schools did not yet exist in France, and the closest equivalent, 'Sciences-Po', the political science faculty, had the reputation of being a haven for rich boys seeking an easy diploma. So I enrolled in both the Sorbonne and the Law School.

My academic duties somewhat limited my social life; I was allowed to go out twice a week, including Saturday night. But oddly enough, unlike most people who have been deprived of freedom, I did not take advantage of it. I didn't rush into the wild night life of the Latin Quarter, nor did I discover romance, nor even the theatre or cinema. I got my degrees with top honours in Medieval French, awarded by Gustave Cohen himself. Afterwards, satisfied and happy, I went off to do my military service, but not without a certain apprehension. Although my nanny-ridden childhood was far behind me, I had the feeling that the army, like the university, was merely an extension of my schooling; my real entry into the adult world would come only later. After all, a sergeant is not so very different from a nanny!

Since I'd opted for the Cavalry, I was automatically assigned to Saumur, whose reputation for strict discipline and spartan conditions both fascinated and intimidated me. When I was told on the evening of my induction into the Eleventh Cuirassiers that I'd have to sleep on a bed of straw in the Dupleix barracks, I felt all at once lost and homeless. (The NCO finally sent us off to spend the night at home.) The next morning, all the recruits were piled into an extraordinarily slow train which took twenty-four hours to reach Saumur, less than two hundred miles away. Army life had indeed begun.

Immediately assigned to a brigade and treated like everyone else, I was quite satisfied with my lot. A cadet without a stripe to his uniform, I led the life of an ordinary soldier: reveille at six, cold-water wash, hospital-cornered bed, then classes all day long. The training course consisted of five or six months of this regime. The cadet on duty marched us in step to the stables; the officer who assigned us our horses (we were always given the same one) then took us in hand for an hour of fast trotting without stirrups, which wasn't easy. We always had to keep the same distance

behind the horse in front, or else we'd lose our weekend pass. We chased after each other at a great pace and ended the session in a sweat, even in the middle of winter.

This life suited me perfectly: wake up, run, work, inspection . . . it was as invariable and as precisely regulated as a stack of music paper. I certainly seemed to adjust to discipline with remarkable facility!

Field instruction was given in a magnificent setting of sand dunes planted with pine trees. We practised old-fashioned theoretical manœuvres, more reminiscent of the Hundred Years War than preparation for modern battle. At least we learned to determine our location and direction as well as various patrol tactics: reconnoitring, scouting, flanking. These drills soon lost their charm of novelty, however, and became boring and monotonous. Like all good soldiers, I couldn't wait for the end of the course. Fortunately, there was the fabulous spectacle of the Cadre Noir. Elegant in their tight-fitting, gold-buttoned black uniforms, these élite horsemen merited their nickname – 'the Gods' – and we never tired of admiring their wonderfully precise performances of Haute Ecole dressage.

Then there was the annual school gala, and in the midst of the festivities, a moment of intense emotion when we cadets competed in a gymkhana and a steeplechase.

During these months at Saumur, I enjoyed a few small privileges. Like some of the other cadets, I rented a room in a local hotel, only ten minutes on foot from the Cavalry school, and thus had a place of my own where I could go every evening from six to nine, take a bath, dine alone or with friends, before returning to the barracks.

Every weekend the chauffeur came to pick me up. I'd take over the steering-wheel and drive to Ferrières at breakneck speed – over such bad roads that there was indeed a danger of breaking our necks. I'd join the shooting party, leave on Sunday after tea, and be back at Saumur by midnight. Once I almost failed to make it before curfew, when I skidded in the snow and smashed into a railway crossing.

These privileges did not, however, alter the essential fact: at last I felt no different from my comrades. Moreover, Saumur gave me a taste for rigour and effort and further reinforced my sense of discipline.

At the end of the six-month course, I was assigned to Pointoise with the rank of second lieutenant for six more months of duty, whereupon my military career ended without fanfare. (Shortly before 1939, I was given two more training courses of three weeks each – preparation for war is taken seriously in France! – during which I was instructed in motorized transport, my unit having in the meantime abandoned its horses in favour of trucks and half-tracks.)

The impressions we bring back from our long voyage through childhood form a heritage that is never lost. In recalling these early memories, I can see more clearly the extent to which our parents leave an indelible imprint on us. Far more than their words of advice, it is their daily personal example that remains with us forever.

Other members of the family have also influenced my life. I found my grandmother Leonora (Laurie) particularly intriguing, perhaps because she was seldom mentioned. English like her brother Lord Rothschild, she married her French cousin, my grandfather Alphonse. She was very beautiful and had a host of admirers, to whose attentions, it was said, she was not always unresponsive. But old age finally dulled her radiance. One day, after contemplating her reflection in the mirror, she suddenly decided to abandon all forms of coquetry and from then on she never again appeared in society. When she was almost seventy (and I was eighteen months old), she contracted pneumonia after a ride in the Bois de Boulogne and was ordered to stay in bed. A few days later she got up again, put on her most sumptuous evening gown, and dismissed her maid for the night. Then she had dinner in her dining room. She made the long walk from one end of the house to the other, back to her bedroom, unaccompanied. She undressed, lay down and died.

I have always admired her stoical courage and hope to prove worthy of her example.

I've devoted many pages to my adolescence, disregarding my mother's advice: 'Never talk about yourself; one hasn't the right to bore other people with one's problems.' Perhaps there is a note of vanity behind her words: one mustn't reveal one's weaknesses.

Ever since my strictly scheduled, highly organized childhood days, I have had not only an aversion to idleness and inertia, but also a *penchant* for programmes. Even on holiday, I feel guilty doing nothing. But there's something about me that even those close to me do not know. At times now, I fall silent and enjoy drifting into a long and pleasant reverie. I'm capable of living the inner life of a cow, and nothing irritates me more than for some intruder to try to interrupt my ruminations.

An over-organized childhood is also probably responsible for my lack of fantasy, even a certain lack of initiative, which might have turned me into a genuine hermit, had I lived alone. Happily, and undoubtedly not by chance, I have always been attracted by stimulating, dynamic people, and my second wife, Marie-Hélène, has swept me up in her whirlwind existence.

Of all the precepts recommended by my mother, the one that remains foremost in my mind is certainly modesty. So I was amused by the witty

remark of an American reporter towards the end of 1980. During a press conference I held in New York at the request of the Joint Distribution Committee, I happened to mention, while replying to a question about the problems of Jews in France, that I had always been re-elected president of the United Jewish Social Fund by an overwhelming majority. Reading through the press clippings the next day, I came across the reporter's facetious comment: 'Rothschild has a modest way of saying the most immodest things!'

In retrospect, I try to evaluate my upbringing without seeking to pass judgement on my parents. They were more than solicitous; they were concerned with our well-being, health and happiness above all else; they gave us emotional security and boundless affection. They planned and supervised our schooling, our physical development, and scrupulously taught us the moral, religious and civic principles they knew to be essential.

But isn't there always another side to the coin? Often, when they should have been strict, they were indulgent; when they should have been rigorous, they were too lenient. Instead of making us wait for gifts and treats until we deserved them, they spoiled us terribly. But when we began to want to express ourselves, to develop our own personalities, to try our wings – in short, when we wanted to grow up – they held us back. Of course, in doing so they spared us many errors and ordeals; but isn't it wiser to help children eventually become adults, to teach them to face life? My mother was undoubtedly the more responsible for the feeling of frustration which, I now realize, dominated my childhood. There is only too much evidence today of the harmful effects of an over-permissive upbringing for me to regret having been so tightly held in hand. But if my parents had been more discreet in their severity, if they had allowed us to take a few reasonable risks, if they had shown more confidence in us, it would have saved the young man I was then a lot of precious time lost in hesitation and experimentation.

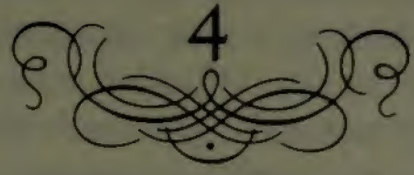
Unlike so many others, I have therefore never felt nostalgic about my childhood. While I may sometimes regret the fact that I'm no longer young, it is only because, like everyone else, I'd like to be able to start all over again and do so many things so much better. But at the same time, the idea of reliving my childhood horrifies me, in spite of the fêtes, the magic and the marvels that fill my bag of memories to overflowing. Rainer Maria Rilke's famous line: 'Oh, to be a child again! . . . ' has never quite rung true in my ear.

With my military service accomplished, the first stage of my life had come to an end. What neither the *lycée* nor the emancipation of my eighteenth birthday had been able to give me, I had found during my training at Saumur.

Finally at ease within myself, I had one burning desire: to start working at the bank in order to satisfy my craving for action and responsibility. The time had come for me to prove my worth.

At last I was going to plunge into 'real life'.

CHAPTER



The Dear Old Bank

My military service ended just before Yom Kippur of 1931, which was the day that England devalued the pound sterling. The next morning, I passed through the portals of 19 rue Laffitte and began to work for Rothschild Frères.

Founded in 1817 by my great-grandfather James, and then run by my father and my uncles Edmond and Robert, the bank was originally the French branch of the European firm established by the sons of Meyer Amschel, the five 'Gentlemen of Frankfurt'. Long before, the Naples branch and then Frankfurt had disappeared; with Central Europe in a state of bankruptcy, the Vienna branch seemed on the verge of disappearing too. Only London and Paris remained solidly established.

For my contemporaries, the early beginnings and remarkable development of the Rothschilds during the previous century had faded into the misty past. All they saw was the fortune proverbially linked to the name, which my family had accumulated thanks to its extraordinary financial success. They forgot the reality: the enormously hard work of the two generations preceding my father's. Once again, the forest was hidden by the trees! Raised in the seraglio, so to speak, I naturally had a much more accurate idea of what lay behind the eminence and fame of James and of his son Alphonse.

Contrary to popular belief, the Rothschild fortune had no connection with Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo. According to legend, carrier pigeons brought the Rothschilds the first news of the outcome of the battle, thereby enabling them to make an enormous profit on the Stock Exchange. However, a recent study by the London Stock Exchange itself has proven that there was hardly any variation in the market price of public loans either before or after Waterloo, and the 'coup' supposedly brought off by Nathan Rothschild is therefore pure invention.

On the other hand, it is quite true that in 1825 James helped Villèle, the Prime Minister of Charles X, to raise the capital for his famous 'Emigrants' Billion', a loan designed to partially compensate for the spoliations

inflicted during the Revolution. But his first really important financial exploit occurred in 1818: France had signed an agreement with Austria, Prussia, Russia and England, in which she agreed to allocate the sum of 240,800,000 francs (about 26 billion francs at today's rate) as an indemnity for all the groups and individuals who had suffered damage during the Napoleonic wars. James, only twenty-six years old and newly installed in France, arranged to place the loan required to honour this commitment. The conditions he offered the government were infinitely more attractive than those of the financier Laffitte. Villèle thereafter succeeded in making a very advantageous conversion of this loan in 1823, whereupon he publicly expressed his gratitude to James in the most complimentary terms.

Due to this transaction, to his tireless activity and his reputation for integrity, James found himself holding a virtual monopoly on the big European loans; during the course of his professional life, they amounted to the equivalent of 1,200 billion new francs; in addition to which, between 1813 and 1830, England borrowed through the Rothschilds two billion seven hundred million francs, and France one billion one hundred.

During the 19th century, the essential activity of the bank consisted of underwriting loans taken out by various European nations, which meant that the Rothschilds bought the totality of each loan, at considerable personal risk. Afterwards, if the operation succeeded in stabilizing the borrowing nation's financial situation, its credit rose, the loan could be quoted on the Stock Exchange and sold at a more or less profitable margin.

James never forgot that during the 18th century his father and his ancestors had been tradesmen in Frankfurt before becoming financiers, and he never overlooked an opportunity to continue this tradition. He acquired the mercury mines of Almadèn in Spain, and sent agents to California and Mexico to buy precious metals used in European coins; going even further, he began to mint money for such states as Piedmont and the Two Sicilies; he set up an agency in New Orleans to buy cotton, which was resold in Le Havre; he sent agents to Cuba, Puerto Rico and Manila to buy up tobacco, which he then sold to European governments. Like most businessmen, he was attracted by the principle of vertical integration of an enterprise, so he became a shipowner in order to transport his merchandise himself. His fleet included a three-master christened *Ferrières*, which was one of the most handsome and modern vessels of the French merchant navy at that time.

In the industrial field, James had a taste for high-risk ventures, and was audacious enough to back a young man named Emile Pereire, who was employed at the rue Laffitte as a trader for foreign commercial paper. An ardent believer in the scheme to build a railway between Paris and Saint-

Germain, Pereire managed to convince James, who thenceforth was an energetic supporter of this new mode of locomotion. It was still an age when sensible people scoffed at what they termed an 'amusing invention'; when engineers and scholars (led by Arago) declared that the passengers would be asphyxiated in the tunnels; and when Thiers made a speech in the Chamber of Deputies denouncing the entire project as dangerous and impractical. Refusing to be discouraged or dissuaded, James pursued his undertaking and founded the Compagnie du Nord, taking up most of the capital himself. He was Chairman of the Board until his death, and followed its financial, industrial and social policies with the greatest attention.

His generosity was soon proverbial; as Prévot-Paradol later wrote so gracefully, 'His benevolence was worthy of his fortune.' No distress left him unmoved; he used to say that he couldn't go to sleep at night if he knew of any misfortune he had not tried to alleviate.

When the price of wheat in France rose to intolerable heights in 1847 due to a shortage, James bought up all the Russian debts he could find and made an offer to the Tsar to discount them against grain and a bond of fifty million francs deposited with the Bank of France. This proposal, very advantageous for the Russians, was immediately accepted. James then called a meeting of all the grain merchants, induced them to agree to a progressive price cut, and arranged for the delivery of a sufficient amount of grain to force their hand. When he died, the newspapers estimated his loss in this operation at eleven million francs, whereas, they added, he could have made a profit of thirteen million if he had been strictly mercenary.

Throughout his life, James was devoted to the religion of his ancestors and never ceased defending his fellow Jews. For example, he persuaded the Germans to abolish their policy of making Jews pay tolls whenever they travelled, a shameful practice James himself had endured when he was very young, and which was later described as being 'more humiliating for its enforcers than for its victims'.

He was received with honour in all the courts of Europe; he was host in his own home to the leading politicians, diplomats, writers, artists and aristocrats of the day; he was also a patron of the arts.

His sense of family solidarity was unusually strong; he made it a rule of life, as well as the first of the three duties in his personal motto (which was later adopted by the family): *Concordia, industria, integritas*. Like his brother Salomon, who loved to tell the story, he could recall the scene when old father Meyer gathered his five sons and five daughters around his deathbed:

> Before giving us his blessing at the moment of our final parting, my father reminded us that according to the law of God we should consider all men our brethren and do as much for others as our means permitted, regardless of their race or creed. He advised us to remain united and carry on together the banking activities he had initiated. He told us the tale of the King of the Scythians who summoned his sons to his deathbed and showed them a sheaf of arrows so tightly bound together that nobody could break it; then, taking them apart, he showed them how easy it was to break each arrow separately. 'As long as you remain united,' he told us, 'you will be strong and powerful; but the day you separate will mark the end of your prosperity.'

(When James was knighted, he chose five arrows as one of the symbols on his coat of arms; and in 1968, the same five arrows became the trademark of the Rothschild Bank until its nationalization.)

The solid ties between James and his four brothers never weakened, and it was common knowledge that the five European branches worked together very closely. (James's couriers had the reputation of being the swiftest in Europe, his network of informants the most efficient. This did not preclude prudence: all correspondence was written in Hebrew, and – one never knows – it was always unsigned.)

Ten thousand mourners, from the greatest to the humblest, followed James's coffin on foot in 1868. The funeral procession was over two kilometres long; traffic on the boulevards was paralysed for hours. The press unanimously lauded his benevolence, his honesty and sense of justice, and mentioned with surprise and admiration the extreme simplicity of his funeral, in sharp contrast to the recent extravaganza of his friend Rossini. It was James himself who had, before he died, chosen to leave by 'second class', in an unadorned hearse drawn by two black horses.

His heir, my grandfather Alphonse, was born and bred in Paris and had therefore never experienced the hardships of the ghetto. On the contrary, he had benefited from all the refinements of a French education; his tutor was a famous writer of the time, Désiré Nisard, director of the Ecole Normale and a future member of the Académie Française. When he took charge of the bank, it was at the height of its power and renown. A few years later, he had the chance to prove his patriotism as well as his ability.

After the defeat of 1870, Thiers sought to launch a huge bond issue of five billion francs as an indemnity which Germany had made a condition before liberating the French territory it had occupied. Alphonse, along with his friend the Finance Minister Léon Say, arranged all the technicalities of the loan and personally contributed to its immediate success. (It was over-subscribed by 500 per cent and was one of the greatest successes in our financial history.) Alphonse himself had underwritten almost half of it, that is to say, about two and a half billion francs.

Faithful to the tradition of Jewish solidarity, Alphonse deliberately parted company with his best client, tsarist Russia, refusing to co-operate any longer with a government responsible for murderous pogroms.

Alphonse was also famous for his elegant manners and his generosity to artists. A member of the Institute, he enriched and completed his father's collection not only with munificence, but also with taste. In fact, he was a patron of a rather special kind; he wanted to help contemporary artists, but, out of tact, he didn't want to make them feel indebted to him. So he visited all of the Salons and exhibitions, encouraging the artists he admired by buying their works. He thus acquired countless paintings, sculptures and prints; and so that no one could suspect him of ulterior motives, he donated them to museums, town halls and schools throughout France. (When he died, *l'Art* published a special issue in his memory, including the list of two hundred cities and towns that were beneficiaries of his donations, which involved literally thousands of works of art.) The museum in Cannes was christened the 'Musée Alphonse de Rothschild' before a cheering city council – which did not, however, prevent the councillors from appropriating the family villa in 1940 in the name of the Vichy government, nor from refusing to annul the sale after the war, despite my father's ardently expressed desire to buy it back.

After their deaths, the shadow of these two exceptional men, James and Alphonse, was ever present on the rue Laffitte, and weighed heavily on the thoughts, the judgement and behaviour of their successors.

Among the family traditions that composed the heritage of the rue Laffitte, there was an entire folklore of stories, many of them flavoured with Jewish humour. Numerous anecdotes involved a member of the family being mocked by someone humbler but smarter than he: a new dialectic with 'rich man, poor man' replacing that of 'master, slave'. I can remember two of them in particular:

A chestnut vendor had set up his little cart across the street from the bank. One day a client, suddenly realizing that he hadn't enough money with him at the moment for his purchase, asked if he couldn't pay for it the next day. 'I'm sorry,' replied the vendor, 'but I've got an agreement with the Rothschilds: they don't sell chestnuts, and I don't give credit.'

The other concerns two particularly miserable beggars who'd touched a soft spot in a Rothschild's heart. He decided to give each of them a monthly allowance. One of them died. The following month, the other collected his money and asked for his brother's allowance too. The cashier refused. 'The payments stop when you die,' he explained. To which the survivor indignantly replied, 'So who's my brother's heir, Rothschild or me?'

Shortly before World War I, the House of Rothschild split into

independent entities, each in its own country, and, after 1918, each chose its own course.

London became a merchant bank, financing loans to industry through acceptances which they underwrote, at the same time acting as financial adviser, intermediary and promoter. 'N. M. Rothschild and Sons' also owned a gold refinery, becoming so predominant in this field that even now the price of gold is decided each day in its offices in New Court on St Swithin's Lane, a few steps away from the Bank of England. One must not forget that the City of London was the most active financial centre in the world until the period between the two world wars, when New York assumed the lead.

Paris, on the other hand, was merely a narrow, rather provincial financial market. The generation before me had taken charge of the business less than ten years before World War I. In 1914, they had an opportunity to renew a past tradition in an operation that was typically 19th century in character: just after the outbreak of hostilities, the French government needed to borrow dollars. They contacted Morgan's, who preferred, however, to deal with the Rothschilds rather than with a government. Once the loan was completed, Rothschild Frères found themselves the debtors. They passed on the dollars to the government without taking any commission, although the deal committed them entirely.

In all circumstances, my father saw himself as a disinterested servant of his country. Wilfrid Baumgartner once told me that during the 1920s, when he was Secretary of the Treasury, he had to face a financial obligation which he couldn't meet in time. He appealed to my father, who made it a point of honour to lend him the necessary funds without the slightest discussion.

But after 1918 a new world appeared, marked by inflation and monetary erosion. My father's generation lost its footing; it had grown up during the exceptionally stable period of prices and wages that had lasted from 1870 to 1914, a golden age of forty-four years during which the value of money didn't fluctuate and income tax was unknown!

James had already experienced difficulty in adapting to new economic and financial conditions, if one can believe the historians of the period. He disagreed so strongly with the popular neo-Saint-Simonean theories that he reduced his financial activity during the Second Empire. 'He was as unwilling to accept financial revolution as the political kind.' He did not believe in collective capitalism where finance was concerned, and wrote a detailed report denouncing its dangers and predicting bankruptcy for the Crédits Mobiliers in Austria and France. But this retrenchment during James's time had only minor consequence for the bank, which remained intensely active in many sectors. After 1918, however, a private institu-

The château at Ferrières.

The Main Hall.

My parents' engagement (with Boulot).

My parents at Longchamp, *c.*1925.

With my two sisters.

At Longchamp in those golden years: with Elvire Popesco.

Alix and me on the eve of our wedding: December 1937.

Style at Longchamp: my mother and a friend.

Where would I be without my pipe?

Will I become a champion?

My sister Jacqueline accompanies her husband Grisha Piatigorsky on the bassoon.

At Saumur in 1931 with Bokanowski, Motte and Launay.

Officer cadet at Saumur with Yves Motte.

1942: I gaze at David as a baby who . . .

. . . gazes at Alexandre as a baby: 1980.

14 July 1943 in London: flag-bearer of the Free French.

Guy, Alain (right), Élie (left).

Between Claude Pompidou and Jacques Chaban-Delmas.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth crosses a paddock at Meautry observed unawares by a telelens.

At Longchamp, a bowler hat instead of an umbrella.

Exbury struts proudly, Deforge beams, after their victory in the Arc de Triomphe, 1963.

Green Number One at Soto Grande, Costa del Sol.

In Paris with Ben Gurion.

Into one of the mines of Penarroya.

In Jerusalem with Shimon Peres.

The Mayor of Ferrières.

With the Prime Minister at the inauguration of the Monument to the Unknown Jewish Martyr.

Liz Taylor and Richard Burton stride into the paddock at Longchamp.

The very proper world of horse racing.

tion could no longer be the banker of governments, as the Rothschilds had been during the previous century, when a popular description was: 'Banker of kings, king of bankers'. At this stage, what the rue Laffitte needed was a bold innovator.

When I'd finished my studies and military service and entered a world that was strange and yet familiar, the venerable pound sterling had just lost its convertibility into gold. This was no small event; it was to undermine the most established ideas and mark the beginning of a painful period of groping in the dark, with the economic uncertainty creating political instability as well.

Impossible to be more naïve, more ignorant or more intimidated than I was when I started working at the bank, wide-eyed and prepared to admire everything in sight. I was conscious of entering a famous, sacrosanct shrine: famous because the entire history of the French Rothschilds had unfolded there; sacrosanct because it was the repository of all their traditions. A temple of finance, guardian of historical secrets, it had held such formidable power in the previous century that even today it strikes the imagination.

My inexperience was entrusted to Monsieur Goutte, my father's right-hand man. Every morning, he read the newspapers aloud to me, trying to comment on everything in relation to the rue Laffitte, most often an illusory exercise! An intelligent man, unconditionally devoted to the Rothschilds, he enjoyed making witty comments and, on occasion, telling stories with a certain detachment that bordered on cynicism. He taught me how to read stock quotations and to quote interest rates in fractions, from one half to one-sixty-fourth, instead of the usual decimals – all of which was not very difficult, even for a novice. I became familiar with accounting techniques – which was not very stimulating, and little by little my enthusiasm waned. I also learned how to write business letters, generally the stereotyped kind acknowledging receipt of some document or other. The most pompous were reserved for Cardinal Pacelli, the future Pope Pius XII, who was then in charge of the Vatican's business affairs and had maintained the tradition of keeping a small account with us. We used the formal large-sized stationery called 'ministerial type', and invariably terminated by assuring 'His Eminence of the respectful sentiments with which we remained his devoted servants'.

It didn't take me long to realize that the past clung to everything and everyone. The staff were imbued with the grandeur of 'the name' and of the responsibilities it imposed. Vestiges of the previous century were encountered at every moment and in every corner, even some that no longer had any reason for being. The history of the House was as evident in

visible relics as in the old stories that everyone loved to tell.

The setting in which 'Messieurs de Rothschild Frères' lived contributed a lot to this atmosphere. Since 1817, the bank had been housed in a mansion on the rue d'Artois, later rechristened rue Laffitte in honour of the well-known financier, Prime Minister and Finance Minister under Louis Philippe. (Its synonymy with the family vineyard, Château-Lafite, is purely coincidental, as the difference in spelling would suggest.) Acquired by my great-grandfather James, the building had been the private residence of Queen Hortense, whose son Prince Charles-Louis-Napoleon, the future Napoleon III, was born there in 1808. James lived in it all his life, and until it was demolished in 1968, one could still see the room in which he died, piously preserved in its original state. Throughout the years, James had added several adjacent buildings to the original edifice, so that the offices occupied numbers 19, 21 and 23.

All of the activity of the bank centred on what was called 'the Room', a vast rectangular space with five windows overlooking the street. Perpendicular to the wall between each window was a large, high, wide desk, each one intended for a partner, so that they sat one behind the other.

It was here that the employees, visitors, informers and brokers gathered to make their reports to the heads of the bank or to receive instructions. Although there was always one partner in each generation with more authority than the others, the organization remained basically collegiate, and while each partner also had a private office, it was used only for transacting personal business.

When I made my début in 1931, the Room was quite lively at the end of the morning and again after the closing of the Stock Exchange. In James's time, however, it had been a scene of continuous chaos and frenzied activity: streams of people arrived on various missions, trying to get a word in or to hear one from the impressive and domineering personage who ruled over the establishment. The father of playwright Georges Feydeau, who worked at the rue Laffitte during James's reign, gave a good description of it in his memoirs:

> It was incredible how everything in this immense banking house was ruled with a rod of iron. What amazing order everywhere! Such willing employees, and so intelligent! Such submissive sons! Such a sense of hierarchy! Such respect! . . . I do not think it is possible to find anywhere in the world a bank where everything is so organized, correct and respectable. The atmosphere is one of important business and of a solid fortune laboriously acquired; the department heads are respectable people; the offices are so clean that it is a pleasure to see them; in short, apart from a few over-eccentric quips, during the fifteen years I've known the house I've seen nothing that was not entirely honourable, proper and fitting . . .

He also comments humorously on 'the pitiless and incessant parade of friends of all three sexes: male, female and beggar . . . '

This huge communal room was typical of all private banks, in America as well as in England and France. But after World War II, the manners and methods of work had changed, so my cousins and I took the initiative of transforming the Room into a conference room.

A panel of ivory buttons built into each partner's desk enabled them to summon the departmental heads, whose duties bore such mysterious titles as 'Investments', 'Master Ledger' and 'Liquidations'. Only one or two of the top clerks had the exceptional privilege of seeing their names on one of the ivory buttons. Amid all these remnants of an outdated organization, the telephone introduced a modern note, even though it was largely a decorative accessory because my father used it more often to contact people inside the bank through the switchboard, rather than to make outside calls.

Upon leaving the Room, the 19th-century décor vanished and one was surrounded by a complicated series of offices and cubicles, each housing one or several employees whose duties varied according to necessity. These bare-walled rooms, ill-lit (except for those with windows), depressing and drab, also recalled the past in their haphazard arrangement and their odour of stale tobacco and mustiness. After decades of underemployment, everyone worked slowly, without supervision or discipline. There was once said to be an employee who left his hat permanently hanging in the cloakroom in order to give the impression that he was there, although he actually turned up only on payday. My grandfather, so the story goes, noticed him on one of these occasions, congratulated him on his diligence, and gave him a rise! It is fitting that the Rothschilds should be able to laugh at themselves, for in reality my grandfather Alphonse was not a man to let things go nor to let himself be fooled.

Keeping the past alive requires a scrupulous observance of ritual. At the rue Laffitte, the ushers – all of them former municipal guards retired at the age of forty-five – wore morning coats, a custom we preserved until the bank was nationalized. The most typical old tradition was the ceremony called 'the procession'. Shortly before New Year's Day, the partners formed a reception line in the Room, as for a wedding or a funeral, and greeted the entire staff, shaking each one's hand and presenting New Year's wishes along with an envelope containing their annual bonus and the announcement of their salary for the coming year. Each one filed past in a precise order, advancing when his name was announced in stentorian tones by the head usher, who bore the marvellous name of 'Dunce'. We maintained this tradition until 1968, when the bank changed in size, in name and in style.

On the other side of this vast room lay the private apartments, consisting of a dining room and private offices. Here, the atmosphere was entirely different. Dark flowered carpets, walls half-covered with wood panelling and the upper half with green velvet, upholstered corridors, dark red leather sofas, heavy oaken doors reinforced on the outside by green felt-covered swinging panels. The 20th century was an intruder in this realm of Queen Hortense, Louis Philippe and Napoleon III, but where the 'Belle Epoque' had barely had time to leave its trace.

Nevertheless, Rothschild Frères was more of a family secretariat than a working bank. Of course, we maintained (at great expense) a limited number of personal accounts, and we felt morally obliged to underwrite a certain portion of each new government loan; but that was the extent of our banking activities.

This stagnation did not, however, detract from the bank's reputation, which was its most important asset. While its *panache* may have lost its brilliance, the recognition of its integrity, stability and seriousness remained intact.

Unlike the London branch, the Paris house had been investing heavily in industry since 1870: in railways, mining, the production and distribution of electricity and especially in oil. But here, too, I had to admit that the bank restricted its efforts to managing its holdings instead of taking initiatives.

Where oil was concerned, the rue Laffitte followed a picturesque course that led to some unforeseen results. It seems that my grandfather had been impressed by the use of petrol lamps and predicted that their use would become general. He bought oil wells in the Caucasus and entrusted their management to a small team installed on the top floor of our Paris office. They were so meticulous that they personally decided on the bonuses or pay cuts of each worker. Still, the results could not have been too bad, because at the beginning of 1914, Royal Dutch acquired the company in exchange for what I was told equalled 10 per cent of its own capital. Three years later, the Russian revolutionaries confiscated the wells – the operation was a total loss. Convinced that the Rothschilds had foreseen events and hoodwinked him, Sir Henry Deterding, the president of Royal Dutch, never forgave the family as long as he lived. I know that 'one lends only to the rich', as the saying goes, but to attribute the gift of prophecy to my family was an unrealistic fantasy.

The Rothschild Bank emerged from its torpor only on one occasion, but it was an occasion of major importance.

After 1931, all of Central Europe went bankrupt, including the Credit Anstalt in Vienna, of which my cousin Louis de Rothschild was Chairman. He had been careless enough to personally underwrite the trans-

actions of a Dutch subsidiary, the Amstel Bank, which unfortunately went into bankruptcy too. Without a moment's hesitation, my father raised an enormous sum, the equivalent of eight million dollars at the time, provided by the French family with a contribution from the London branch, in order to honour Louis' obligations and save the family reputation. The Viennese branch gave as security a collection of frozen assets which were realized by the rue Laffitte, and when war broke out in 1939, all of the debts had been liquidated. For once, a salvage operation had a happy ending.

My father must have finally realized that I was underemployed at the bank; two years later, he had me appointed Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Compagnie du Chemin du Fer du Nord. Founded by my great-grandfather on 18 September 1845, this company had been presided over after him by my grandfather, then by my father. It operated the densest railway network in one of the richest industrial regions of France. The company offices were in a building adjoining the Gare du Nord railway terminus in Paris. Every Tuesday and Friday at two o'clock, I had to explain the decisions which a competent staff wished the committee to consider. Although my role was restricted, I was able to observe the operations of a large company that was often involved in public financing.

My position also enabled me to experience something which had long tempted me: a trip on the engine of the rapid Boulogne–Paris train which brought passengers from London.

This was the era of the steam engine, run by a two-man team of engineer and stoker. Before leaving the station, they had to raise the boiler pressure to its maximum. I was astonished to hear the steam hiss from the safety valve less than thirty seconds before the scheduled departure time! What masterful skill! Especially considering the imprecision of that gigantic machine.

The fire compartment was four metres long. The stoker heaved a huge shovelfull of coal through a small round opening onto the exact spot he judged best for maintaining the fire. This procedure had to be repeated every two minutes. The engineer, who stood on the left, was unable to see the signals from a distance when the tracks curved to the right, so the stoker, who knew the route by heart, had to lean over and relay the necessary information to his team-mate without delay.

Travelling at 120 kilometres per hour in a clatter of metal, it was impressive to speed through the stations: we simply gobbled them up.

On reaching our destination my face was completely black with soot as I shook hands enthusiastically with the two heroes of the day.

Shortly before I started to work at the rue Laffitte, my father had chosen

an assistant to whom he entrusted the actual management of the railway company: René Mayer, a man of impressive authority, ability and height. It was he who negotiated the nationalization of the railways with the Popular Front government in 1937 and succeeded in preserving their private assets, thus permitting them to survive for a long time as holding companies. René and I became close friends, especially after the defeat of France in 1940, and later on when he was in London as a minister of the Algiers cabinet. After the war, he chose to remain in politics, and was Prime Minister before assuming the presidency of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1955. He then gave up public life, returned to the private sector, and finally accepted my offer to become president of the Société Le Nickel – of which more later, when on the subject of our mining investments.

With the impatience of a young man starved of activity, I seized every opportunity during these pre-war years to learn and to keep busy. I tried my hand at speculation on the Stock Exchange on a small scale, which proved to be a useful initiation.

Buried among the minor holdings of the family, I discovered a company called TEM (Travail Eléctrique des Métaux), which produced electric batteries. Without actually serving on its board, I became, for all practical purposes, its boss. The business was not very profitable, but it gave me good experience in industrial management. TEM belonged to one of those professional *ententes* which the government had created in order to limit the collapse of prices. They were organized and supervised by an arbiter, who in this particular case was none other than Pierre Pucheu – whom I was to meet again later in very different circumstances.

People have forgotten how great was the confusion of ideas created by the Depression. Those responsible for the economy, and especially the financiers, sought a way to parry the blow, began to question traditional methods, improvised solutions. Stagnation gave rise to an incredible proliferation of political and economic theories which even the most intelligent found incomprehensible. For a while, the rise of Fascism, with its concept of autarchy seemed to offer a valid solution to the crisis. But the Spanish Civil War soon exposed the odiousness of this ideology. Roosevelt's policy – fighting deflation by a rise in salaries, a budget deficit and devaluation – seemed shocking and revolutionary to many Americans, while in France, a few enlightened minds appreciated the advantages of his strategy. In 1981, the French Socialist government employed the same method, but alas, in a situation completely contrary to that of the United States in 1932. And the results are there for all to see.

In the final analysis, and in the absence of any true science of

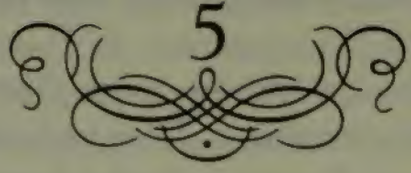
economics, the Depression remained mysterious and inexplicable. Even the most far-fetched theories were greeted with optimism – for a moment, at least.

Personally, I began to see things more clearly the day I met two economists, the Guillaume brothers. They had elaborated a theory which analysed the mechanism of the creation and destruction of scrip currency as well as its consequences. A mathematical formula supposedly permitted them to anticipate cycles of inflation and deflation, and to predict fluctuations on the Stock Exchange. But their embryonic science failed to live up to its expectations. In any case, I am indebted to them for having started me thinking about the inflationary effects of indebtedness – a vast subject!

To return to my first few years at the bank: hard as I try, I cannot remember any real activity. Maintaining tradition is fine, but wasn't it the purpose of banking and finance to do business? To tell the truth, I was disappointed; like sister Anne, I saw nothing coming.

I was thirty when the war broke out. I'd learned a smattering of various subjects; I'd absorbed a little knowledge, developed my sense of responsibility. But I still had not acquired any real professional experience.

CHAPTER



Allegro Ma Non Troppo

While the bank was gently prolonging the 19th century, France was resting on her laurels. After the formidable explosion of triumphant joy in 1918, after the miraculous unanimity of the conservative parliamentary election in 1920, came a time of disillusion.

I look back upon my years as a young man, that decade between my twentieth birthday and World War II, as a period during which France seemed afflicted with paralysis. It wasn't solely due to the Wall Street crash. In fact, the Depression reached our country several months later than the other European nations, and even then was less spectacular as our economy was less dynamic. More than 50 per cent of the French population still depended, directly or indirectly, on agriculture; the nation was therefore less vulnerable to the dramatic effects of an industrial and commercial crisis which hit the United States and Great Britain much harder.

Undoubtedly, the million and a half young men killed on the battlefield were cruelly missed in France: their youth, their dynamism, their productivity, their buying power, their enthusiasm. Nothing seemed to budge, nothing seemed to want to change, nothing seemed possible, politically or economically. France had become an old country, a country of old people, whose population for the first time in its history was not renewing itself. It was a time when someone could maliciously ask, 'Why does France choose such old men to govern her?' and hear an Englishman reply, 'Because she can't find anyone older!'

What a contrast to the quarter of a century following World War II, when initiative, development, modernization, industrialization and growth literally exploded in all directions, anchoring in people's minds the idea of continuous progress.

France was old and tired; but I was twenty years old in 1929 and I felt young and vigorous!

As I've said, my life of freedom began on the day of my eighteenth

birthday. The first symbol of it had been the automobile my father gave me three weeks later for having passed my second *baccalauréat*.

American cars had started to make an appearance on the French market a few years before I turned eighteen and was old enough to pass my driving test. And what a revolutionary appearance it was! They were silent, ours were noisy; they were smooth, able to crawl in top gear at the speed of a walking man, while the French cars needed to be constantly restarted by continually changing gear.

It's almost impossible to imagine today the extent to which cars were the most fascinating and exciting toys of the thirties. My first one was a little khaki-coloured two-seater Chrysler convertible, open to all the winds. It gave me as much pride as pleasure when I drove it to my classes at the Sorbonne or into the country. There was little traffic then; petrol was cheap; even in the city, there was always a parking place right in front of one's doorstep; traffic lights and one-way streets did not exist, nor did speed limits, and there was no law requiring exhaust silencers! In Europe, very few cars were mass-produced, and the annual Automobile Salon displayed a multitude of more or less well-known motors, garbed in imaginative bodies entirely hand-forged by artisans. This was as true of the luxurious Hispano-Suiza as of the sporty Lorraine-Dietrich or the droll-looking Georges-Irat. First one had to order a chassis; then, after a delay of several months, the body was made for it by a specialist, after its shape and colour scheme had been carefully selected, as nowadays we plan the decoration of an apartment.

Everybody drove too fast, heedless of the danger. We trusted our supposedly infallible skill as much as the rapidity of our reflexes. Nobody ever drove anywhere without recording the departure and arrival times to the minute, then calculating the average speed per hour. We described our drives as if they were explorations; we made a note of the fast cars we'd succeeded in overtaking after gruelling duels that left us with a sense of victory, sometimes throwing caution to the winds. We held endless discussions about the performances and characteristics of the different makes of cars, their various driving techniques, their strong and weak points, their lines, the colours that suited them best.

Today, with nothing but assembly-line models turned out by the millions, which creep along, imprisoned in interminable lanes of cars, which are practically impossible to park and get rid of on reaching one's destination, this object of luxury that used to provide the same thrill as a thoroughbred horse, has been reduced to the rank of a commonplace object, sometimes useful, always cumbersome.

The automobile played a primordial role in our holiday strategy. We used

to choose vacation spots in consideration of the route that led there, and the prospects of being able to compare one's car with those of one's rivals. This is perhaps why I selected Le Touquet, where I spent two summers enjoying the tranquil charm of this large seaside resort so English in style and manner – and especially enjoyed playing golf with Buzzie and Boy Scheftel (who won the Boys' Championship that year) and with Charlie and Bobby Sweeney, who became one of the very best amateur golfers of the United States and Europe.

Then I discovered Biarritz. The month of September was the height of the season. I was twenty, the age for parties, and Biarritz was one continual party from morning until early the following morning, in the midst of a host of Spaniards and South Americans, all very young, passionate, uninhibited.

Every day at noon, in front of the Hotel du Palais, began the parade of cars, each as shiny as the next: Rolls Royce, Packard, Bentley, Duesenberg, Hispano, driven by arrogant young men accompanied by superb girls with distant, haughty airs. We'd go swimming at the beach called 'Chamber of Love' or at the foot of the 'Virgin's Rock', before playing golf on the new Chiberta links, with titled, sun-tanned members of the oldest families of Europe and South America.

As soon as we'd changed out of our golf clothes, there was no question of going anywhere else than to the Basque Bar, to join the crowd of aristocrats and adventurers, all thirsting for pleasure, champagne and conquests. I believe that I never dined with less than twenty guests, many of whom re-invited themselves each evening; nor ever neglected the tradition of winding up the evening at Sheherazade, a restaurant-night-club in the open country. The entrance was at the end of a drive lined with valets in formal Russian attire, holding torches that illuminated the warm night. On the dance floor (if one could reach it) we were among the first to hear the songs still famous today, such as 'Ramona' and 'Adios muchacho companero de mi vida', whose melodies still put me in a sentimental mood.

I look back on those incomparable days at Biarritz as the gayest, most carefree and stimulating fête that I have ever known. It was only a fairy-tale, a magic bubble that burst in 1930, with the worldwide economic crash. The atmosphere of festivity withdrew like the ocean tide, leaving Biarritz a family-style beach frequented by what we used to call with the cruelty of youth 'a few old biddies with their hen-pecked husbands and their snivelling kids'.

Cinderella lost her slipper.

At the age of eighteen, passing without transition from the cloistered life

of a child to the privileged world of international society, I assumed my new role in life with a mixture of enthusiasm, level-headedness and innocence.

The automobile had been the first symbol of my freedom. There remained all the rest – and especially women.

Obviously, the inexperienced, shy adolescent that I was then had everything to learn of life before knowing how to find, how to appreciate, how to convince. The problem wasn't simple! Who, when, where and how? At that time, young girls did not let themselves go; the ones I knew, and my sisters' friends, were as chaste as were the girl students I met at the Sorbonne. The young women in my parents' entourage considered me just a 'little boy' . . . 'Other times, other customs'. Barely fifty years have passed, and that world has toppled into oblivion.

So I had to explore another universe, inhabited by dubious creatures who had not yet found a nest – which is perhaps why they were called *demi-mondaines*. They were spoken of in veiled terms and popularly given names of various kinds of birds, such as *cocottes* and *poules*, perhaps in order to better distinguish between the various species. On a rising scale, they ranged from the young woman who asked only for enough money to ensure the next day's meals, to the *grande cocotte*, who lived like a society woman, richly and elegantly supported by several admirers, each of whom was generally unaware of the existence of the others. All of these ladies had one thing in common: they gave themselves for money, preferably for a limited period of time. But they always offered themselves the luxury of refusing men who weren't to their liking.

When one frequented this world apart and accidentally ran into one's parents or somebody from one's own social circle, it would not have been proper to exchange greetings. Each one would pretend not to see the other. (My mother, however, could never resist giving me an imperceptible smile.) Racecourses and casinos, the favourite stamping grounds of *demi-mondaines*, had been out of bounds for women of society until 1914: in these dens of perdition they might have gazed upon the spectacle of sin, if only from a distance!

After a few insignificant encounters, I fell under the spell of a bewitching Romanian. Barely two months went by before my worried parents started to give me sobering lectures in the hope of re-establishing the controlled and reasonable order of childhood. The black-haired beauty left on a trip and I never saw her again.

In my day, the *grandes cocottes* (those who succeeded in making people forget that they were kept women) had disappeared. But people still told stories about some of the most famous: Emilienne d'Alençon, Cléo de Mérode, who was nicknamed 'empty stomach' because of the turban she

always wore and because of the saying, 'an empty stomach has no ears'!

However, I met a survivor of that species in danger of extinction. She had lost her youth but retained all of her volubility. Her name was Charlie, and Charlie, keenly aware of the evolution in her domain, once said to me with a disillusioned air, 'You see, my boy, between the society women and the homosexuals, there's nothing left for us!'

This impassable barrier between the two feminine worlds – on the one side, the women of easy virtue with whom one finally hadn't much in common, and on the other, the untouchables of one's own social circle whom one admired and would like to love – was not very propitious for the convergence of love and desire. This artificial duality led to the satisfaction of neither one nor the other.

When I think, with the perspective of half a century, of all that my independence permitted me to grasp and to enjoy, I am reminded of the saying, 'It's better to feel remorse than regret.'

Our subconscious sometimes has its logic. For me, it devised the fantasy of marriage as the only circumstance capable of combining all the different forms of love. I was subjugated by this solution to squaring the circle; it monopolized my daydreams, guided the directions of my discreet explorations. Despite my availability, the choice was limited, if only because of the religious requirement. I had to wait for the spark to be set off. It occurred when I was least expecting it, and in a very different way from how I had imagined.

Another passion vied with my amatory activities at that time and was the decisive factor in my weekend and holiday programmes: golf. Where did it come from?

Throughout my childhood, one of my greatest pleasures had been horses. I rode as a young man; I even exercised my father's racehorses, was a member of a Hunt, and perfected my equestrian skills during my military service at Saumur. During adolescence, I'd played tennis with friends my age while still continuing to play golf, but very badly. For a long time I alternated these three disciplines more or less successfully.

A few years before my military service, on returning from a summer vacation with my cousins, the Esmonds, in Scotland, where I'd played a lot of golf, I suddenly decided to devote myself exclusively to this sport. It was an instinctive, impulsive decision.

On reflection, my choice was influenced by various factors: I'd finally made sufficient progress in golf to reach a competitive level; at the same time, I saw in it a means of proving my own worth to myself without owing anything to anybody. There was also the simple pleasure of the sport itself,

the joy of being surrounded by greenery, of walking over soft and pleasant grounds, forgetting every worry except the one provided by that disobedient little white ball. Golf becomes an obsession for everyone who practises it; finally, it is like an incurable disease. With my perfectionist nature, I was an ideal victim.

All my life, I've been seeking 'the solution to the problem'; the movement is so unnatural and complex, progress so provisional! As my parents used to do, I always return from a round of golf with some magic new formula for the 'swing', the 'approaching' and the 'putting' – and I'm generally disillusioned the next time I play. I'm afraid in the end I get more pleasure from experimenting with all sorts of different methods than from merely trying to have fun with what I know how to do. Perhaps, if I were one day to discover the secret of a 'good game', I'd be the unhappiest of men! However, the improbability of this event is reassuring. The key to the enigma will never be found.

I was soon playing well enough to participate in interclub matches and to try my luck in championships. Apart from the desire to prove myself, the wandering life of a band of competitive sportsmen held many new attractions for a young man who had till then led a rather solitary existence. Comradeship and rivalry formed a compatible couple, as did team spirit and independent initiative. During every spring weekend and part of the summer and autumn, we'd go from one golf club to another, from one match to another, a little group – in our minds, an élite – which was admired by a handful of spectators and the rare fans who faithfully followed the tours of our golf circus. Physical fatigue, concentration, controlling one's nerves, fighting off discouragement . . . it was a pretty good school we were in.

Outstanding members of this group were Barbara and André Vagliano, my best friends, their daughters Lally and Sonia, their son Alex, all of them expert golfers. Around them gravitated a little world attracted by their authority, their warmth and generosity.

In the spring of 1939, I played in a three-way encounter at Zandvoort, in the Netherlands, opposing Holland, France and Germany. I won all of my matches, but our team captain spared me from having to meet the 'Nazis' by naming another golfer in my place.

While I participated in competitions every Sunday until 1939 and had always been selected for the French team, it was only after the war that I attained my best level of play. First of all, I had to pick up the game again, and progress was slow – until the day I met Henry Cotton, three times world champion. Cotton made his pupils drive floating balls from the top of the cliff at Monte Carlo, straight into the sea, where a motorboat then collected them. The rounds I played with him in the magnificent setting of

Mont-Agel, under the July sun, remain among the happy moments of my sporting life.

From then on, my vacations were almost exclusively devoted to golf. In September, I'd go to the Lacoste's at Chantaco, near Saint-Jean-de-Luz. Simone was a childhood friend, and I became very close to René.

In 1948, I won one of the most coveted trophies of the time, the Grand Prix du Sud-Ouest, which was held at Saint-Jean-de-Luz on the Nivelle links. We had to play seventy-two holes, four complete rounds of 'medal play scratch', that is to say, without any major disaster. The following year I reached the semi-finals of the French amateur championship.

In 1949, I entered the amateur championship of Great Britain, which was held that year on a magnificent seaside golf course near Dublin. The training round took place in such a violent storm that we had to lean against the wind in order to remain on our feet. One can imagine how easy it was to aim the ball! I got through the first round without any trouble. During the second round, playing against a dangerous little Scotsman, I was one up and two to play. I finished with two pars – but my opponent managed two birdies, and I was eliminated.

Another time, I was selected for the French team playing against Italy in San Remo. All over the town there were posters announcing in Italian the 'great match between the dilettante squadrons'. Of course, it meant 'amateur teams' – but I hadn't yet learned that Italian is a humorous language!

Since I've been involved in horseracing, I've had to give up competitive golf. But every weekend, no matter what the weather (except, of course, in case of snow), I play on a course I've built at Ferrières. All by myself, trundling my golf cart, I can try all of the experiments I like without bothering a soul; and I always feel the same joy when I walk onto the course, the same physical pleasure in hitting 'a good ball'.

Golf thus absorbs most of my leisure time. After the war, I did try skiing at Megève. At that time there were as yet no *téléfériques* or ski-lifts. It was blood and sweat to climb the tracks of soft snow in our sealskins and heavy laced boots. Having arrived exhausted at the summit, there was nothing left to do but to glide down the slope during five minutes of inevitably dangerous descent . . . or fall down, for better or for worse!

In the month of August, Deauville was the place to be, a 'must' for the young smart set. While the casino played only an episodic role at Biarritz, at Deauville it was the centre of nocturnal life. Biarritz had been dominated by Spaniards and South Americans; Deauville was cosmopolitan. Some people went there only to gamble, and for high stakes, especially at the big baccarat table, as opposed to the *chemin de fer*, where the sabot is passed around. In baccarat, there is a 'banker' who holds all of

the bets, and against whom the two sides play. The banker – the person who is gambling – should be a rich man in search of strong emotions, generally costly ones. At Deauville, the bank was in practice held almost exclusively by a Greek named Nicho Zographos, who gambled professionally for the benefit of a syndicate of which he was more or less the champion. There was a considerable amount of capital behind him, or rather them, and it was this machine that eventually caused the downfall of the most inveterate gamblers, for I noticed that they couldn't resist reducing their stakes during a winning streak, while they increased them when they were losing, in the hope of recouping their losses.

In this famous gambling room one thus found money and women. A few names come to mind: Eduardo Martinez de Hoz, the Maharaja of Kapurthala, the Englishman Berry Wall, the American beauty Eleanor Loder, André Citroën, who was more famous there for his *bancos* than for his cars. He owned a seaside villa where the young friends of his children, Jacqueline, Bernard and Maxime, would gather in an atmosphere of light-hearted gaiety that contrasted with the heavy, artificial ambiance of nights at the casino.

Deauville was also, as it had been for a long time and still continues to be, the centre of horseracing as well as the site of the most important French yearling sales – most of them bred in Normandy. On afternoons when the most outstanding ones were scheduled for auction, the crowd was dense and the atmosphere electric. Around 1930, a filly called Ukrania, daughter of the champion Ksar and of Uganda, winner of the Prix de Diane (the French Oaks), was bought by the Comte de Rivaud for what was then an astronomical sum: almost a million francs at the time, the bidding having stopped at 970,000 francs! She turned out to be very disappointing; more precisely, she won only one race – the Prix de Diane. Needless to say, at fabulous odds!

My father also spent the season at Deauville. He had inherited from his father a passion for horses. He'd bred them since he was a young man, but his most successful period was during the decade preceding World War II. He had a really first-class trainer then, Lucien Robert, who had in his charge, among other classic horses, Brantôme, an exceptional colt in every way, the greatest champion my father ever had the luck to breed.

Brantôme's career is legendary, as are the unusual incidents that marked it. Unbeaten as a two-year-old, he won the Triple Crown, the three most important races for colts of that age: the Prix Robert Papin, the Prix Morny and the Grand Critérium. The following year, my father lost his sister, Béatrice Ephrussi. Since racing tradition required an owner in mourning to refrain from showing his colours in public during a period of three months, Brantôme's next season was delayed.

After three easy wins, Brantôme seemed virtually a sure winner of the Prix du Jockey Club, and he would indeed probably have won that prestigious three-year-old championship which fate had withheld from the family since 1911. But bad luck persisted: he started to cough, developed influenza, and was unable to run in the race.

That autumn, after a victorious return to the racecourse, he avenged himself with a brilliant victory in the Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe. During the winter recess, covered with glory, he rested on his laurels, while a short film was being shown on the Boulevards, entitled *Brantôme, the Invincible Horse*.

As a four-year-old, his spring campaign consisted of one victory after another. One Sunday in June, his stable-mate Péniche had just won the Prix de Diane, when Brantôme was led onto the racecourse. For some unknown reason, he took fright, reared up, broke his halter (albeit a new one), and, to quote a newspaper report 'he takes off, hell for leather, through the streets of Chantilly, slides on the pavement, falls, gets up again, resumes his headlong rush, and finally stops at the end of a dead-end street'. One can imagine our anxiety. He was only slightly injured, although he might have killed himself a hundred times over. Alas, the nervous shock broke his morale: he never won a race again. For the first time in his life he finished unplaced in the Ascot Gold Cup, then only fourth in the Arc de Triomphe, behind three fillies he refused to pass.

This was, moreover, the only gallant gesture of his life, for at stud he didn't show the slightest interest in the ladies who were presented to him. To tell the truth, he was 'in love' with a grey mare – at least, it was only in her presence that he became aroused; at the last minute, she'd be replaced by the mare who was really supposed to be bred to him that day and whose charms would not have been sufficient to seduce him.

When the Germans plundered the stud farm at Meautry in 1940, Brantôme was deported – even though he had no Jewish blood. He proved to be a member of the Resistance at heart, producing nothing worthwhile for his usurping owners, whereas after the war his stud season at Meautry resulted in some brilliant offspring. He thus lived happily ever after and had many children. My father adored him. 'I am merely a Baron,' he used to say, 'he is a Prince!' The day he died, a newspaper carried the headline: 'Brantôme de Rothschild is dead . . . ' and the entire press devoted articles to the career of 'the most illustrious champion of the half-century'.

After Deauville, the autumn season in Paris always revolved around the races, especially on Sundays. Before lunch, it was traditional to have a drink at the bar of Fouquet's, the meeting ground of fervent racegoers. Most often we had lunch there too, in the room upstairs. On Sunday

evening, we'd go to 'Jean's' or 'Bob's', two restaurants on opposite sides of the Place Blanche, run by two homosexuals who had once formed a couple but were now competitors. One of them was eventually murdered. The 'celebrities' fought to get a table, but never, never, did a society woman appear in these places. We'd sing songs considered shocking – in reality, scarcely improper – the most famous of which was 'The Cutler's Daughter'. We caroused without risk but not without high spirits.

Fashionable night-clubs are, by definition, few. While everyone who was anyone turned up at the two Russian clubs, Sheherazade and Casanova, it was the Boeuf Sur Le Toit which was for a long time the most in vogue. The favourite haunt of night-birds in the know, frequented at the same time by artists, musicians, painters and poets, celebrities rubbed shoulders with unknowns – temporary or permanent, each one naturally convinced he was an unrecognized genius.

One evening, I had the pleasure of attending the first performance of Ravel's *Bolero*. The enthusiastic audience insisted on an encore. After which, to help us recover from the excitement, the privileged in dinner jackets repaired to the Boeuf sur le Toit. I accompanied my parents and their friends, among them Arthur Rubinstein. Shortly after our arrival, a shy little man who, to add to his embarrassment, had forgotten to dress in evening clothes, was being turned away from the door. Rubinstein leapt to his feet in a rage, brusquely pushed aside the punctilious *maître d'hôtel*. He had recognized Ravel in person . . . who was given another ovation.

Apart from Fouquet's, the elegant places of the era were the Café de Paris, la Crémaillère on the Place Beauvau, and the Pré Catelan during the fine season; but I have no recollection of Maxim's during the thirties – it does not seem to have played the prominent role in Paris life that it had during the Belle Epoque, and which it resumed after World War II.

What was called 'social life' had nothing in common with the life led by kept women. It consisted of formal dinner parties (for an older age-group than mine) and débutante balls (where even for a young man, the required dress was white tie and tails). Personally, I was not very attracted by this sort of party; in any case, I have no undying memory of them, nor of the girls I must have met there. A few well-known social leaders competed in giving fêtes, some of which were dazzling: Etienne de Beaumont, who quipped, 'I give balls for the pleasure of not inviting certain people'; Elsie Mendl at her house in Versailles, among others . . .

Cannes, the final pleasure centre of the year, made an effort to prolong the festivities of Deauville during the winter, but in a more languid style.

My parents owned a villa there where we always used to spend a few weeks in February or March. After much discussion, my sisters and I finally persuaded our parents to spend part of the summer in the south of France.

What joy to figure among the pioneers who invented different vacations, discovered the pleasure of sun and sea, of wind and freedom! The Côte d'Azur was still a dream, sublime countryside not yet disfigured by the leprosy of traffic, modern buildings and trailers piled up on the beaches. Saint-Tropez was still an unknown saint, a modest little village with real fishermen, sparsely inhabited by a few artists following in the wake of Colette. My father bought a motorboat, a Despujol, in which we used to go for lunch on the Lérins islands, swim in the open sea, and discover tranquil little hidden ports on the Côte.

The Aga Khan, a great friend of my parents, owned a villa above Nice. He loved the company of young people, often invited us, and shared our golf games on a course that has since become the racecourse. Incredibly supple despite his legendary weight, he knew how to savour the pleasures of life.

Sometimes I'd charter a yacht with two or three friends and cruise around the Mediterranean, along the coast of Spain, the Balearic Islands, the French and Italian Riviera, as far as Naples and Capri. It was during one of these cruises, in 1935, wanting to return to France from Valencia, that I made my first aeroplane trip in a little plane of the Aéropostale, the famous pioneer French airmail service. Although it had only a single engine, it made an infernal racket, and the flight was not lacking in excitement. When we reached the Pyrenées, the pilot had to circle several times in order to gain the dozens of metres of altitude necessary to cross the mountains by darting through a pass.

A few years before the war, I had the chance to visit Egypt, Palestine and the Lebanon. I was not yet at all interested in Zionism, but Jerusalem was an overwhelming experience. I'll never forget the deep emotion that clutched my heart when I found myself in the middle of that biblical countryside, treading ground so often imagined and suddenly a reality, engulfed by memories of that Old Story, those golden legends, those magical tales, perhaps among the most enchanting and poetic that a child could ever be told. The first fairy-tale, which is never forgotten.

Returning home rather late one night, I found a note from my mother on my pillow: 'Terrible tragedy. That charming Alix has just lost her husband in a train accident.'

Alix Schey de Koromla was descended from an old Hungarian family; but after the treaties of Saint-Germain-en-Laye and of the Trianon, it had been 'nationalized' Czech, since its property was within the frontiers of the new nation created by the dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Through her mother, née Goldsmith-Rothschild, she was related to a branch of my own family. She had married a German businessman,

and was living in Dresden with him and their five- or six-year-old daughter Lili, when she suddenly found herself a widow.

I knew her only slightly, having met her once at one of my parents' luncheon parties. But I was very friendly with her sister Minka, a beautiful young woman who had been living in Paris since the early thirties with her husband, Karl-Hans Strauss; both of them, very well adapted, added a touch of Viennese elegance to Paris life.

The anxiety caused by Hitler's anti-semitic policies increased the grief and distraction of this unhappy young woman. It was no problem for her sister and friends to persuade her to leave a country which had turned hostile and where she was now alone. Alix abandoned all of her property in exchange for the authorization to leave Germany.

When we next met, she was twenty-six years old. In her mourning attire, with her long black hair, already streaked with grey, falling to her shoulders, there was something about her that was evanescent, the suppleness of a vine, the fragility of a reed, all of which added a romantic accent to her natural charm composed of ease, exquisite manners, vivacity and intelligence.

I was almost twenty-eight and had not yet succeeded in finding what I so desperately sought: a union of the emotions and the complicity of love. I had developed, as I've said, a veritable fantasy about marriage, the only condition in which this impossible union might be realized. And now this fixation was finding its perfect answer in the person of a charming, nostalgic, grieving young woman. There was no religious obstacle to impede my nascent inclination, and I knew without being told that my parents liked Alix – my mother's note was an unconscious expression of it. In short, an ideal come to life. In addition to which, unhappiness and injustice could not fail to rouse the chivalry in a young man's heart.

The next summer we became engaged at her family's estate near Bratislava, about two hours from Vienna.

Kovecses – the name of the estate – exuded charm, a special charm composed of simplicity, exoticism and rusticity. The large wooden house did not resemble a classic chalet, but was somewhere in between a Russian manor from a play by Chekhov and a mansion on the banks of the Mississippi during the Civil War: between *The Cherry Orchard* and *Gone With the Wind*. Immense lawns, a deep forest populated with deer, a lazy river bordered by willows, cornfields as far as one could see, in which every footstep set to flight a flock of partridge.

I remember with special emotion Alix's friends and her Hungarian relatives; I remember her father's sister and her husband, a subtle and refined gentleman, both of whom were to die during the deportation;

young boys and girls with Slav charm whom I was to meet again after the war, fugitives from the Soviet occupation, totally destitute, but who succeeded in remaking their lives in France. The ruin and then the dismantling of Kovecses after the war grieved me not only because of the beauty and charm of the site, but because Alix had left the happy memories of her childhood there.

We were married on 30 December 1937. The civil ceremony at the Town Hall of the 1st Arrondissement just missed turning into a comedy. The mayor's speech was studded with gems that had to be censored: he'd intended to say to Alix, 'Madame, this is a golden moment for you!' But above all, in his efforts to find a kind word for each of the relatives come from such distant lands, he lost all sense of geography, paying compliments to the Hungarians which should have been addressed to the Czechs, and vice versa. Fortunately, I was able to read his speech before he pronounced it; otherwise, one after the other, everybody would probably have walked out before the ceremony was over.

The religious rites were held at Ferrières. The *houpe*, a dais surmounted by a cupola under which the Jewish wedding ceremony is performed, had been covered with pink carnations and was set up in the centre of the large white drawing room. While Alix and I moved forward, Grisha Piatigorsky, my brand-new brother-in-law (he'd married my sister that same year), in top hat and tails, drew from his cello tones of joy that moved one to tears.

It was a 'small château ceremony' followed by a luncheon for intimate friends. This privacy was in no way due to the political situation, but to the fact that the etiquette of the day imposed a certain discretion on a man who married a widow.

Among the messages of congratulation, there was a telegram from Frank Goldsmith, Jimmy's father and Clio's grandfather: 'Bravo for the most intelligent thing you've ever done' – which my father mischievously amended to: 'the *only* intelligent thing . . . '

And so everyone joined in their approval of my marriage to this woman of proven intelligence, refinement and virtue, who had experienced the Jewish problems, knew England and America, spoke English and French.

And we sailed on the *Queen Mary* for a honeymoon in America.

Alix was a mixture of contradictory characteristics. She was sharp-witted, but would get bogged down in trying to solve the administrative problems inherited from her past, lost between a typewriter and a mountain of papers. She loved the arts and literature, but her hobby was geology; she never travelled without a little hammer which she used for testing all the stones we happened to come across.

Haunted by the fate of her parents and friends who were still in

Germany, she had only one obsession: to try to help them emigrate and settle in France.

After the war, she became interested in various kinds of social work – for example, 'Youth Aliah', an organization of which she was president, which aided young immigrants to Israel; and she was passionately interested in everything concerned with art; she also played a major role in the campaign for the creation of the Musée de l'Homme, the ethnological museum of Paris. All her life she helped writers, musicians, painters – her greatest concern being the promotion of struggling painters, 'unrecognized geniuses'. So she was very popular, always surrounded by a court of admirers and devoted friends – but also by all sorts of people who unscrupulously put themselves in her hands, counting on her generosity and affection.

In 1953, she was elected mayor of Reux, a little village next to Pont-l'Evêque, where, after we were married, my father gave us a property that had been in the family. Alix devoted the last thirty years of her life to this corner of Normandy which she had adopted and adored – and where she found enough activity in the various cultural committees of the region to satisfy her interest in the arts.

Alix died in the spring of 1982, after a courageous battle against illness. Her funeral was held in the little cemetery surrounding the beautiful 15th-century church she had restored, overlooking an admirable landscape of Normandy in flower. Apart from relatives and friends, the population and notables of the region gathered to show their gratitude, affection and esteem.

To me, Reux is more the name of an estate than of a village. Previously owned by my aunt Béatrice Ephrussi, it had been practically abandoned after her death in 1934. The most romantic property imaginable, it was bombed during the Normandy landings. We then decided to restore a small cottage, a few hundred metres away from the château, which seemed a simple undertaking. The eternal illusion of restorations! One repair led to another, each building required new foundations, each roof needed to be remade, the barns and stables were also tumbling down. The paddocks had no fences; shrubs and weeds invaded the grounds – on one occasion, two days were spent looking for an escaped bull; the cider-press, the cellars, everything was a wreck. We had launched into an endless enterprise.

In the middle of this rolling landscape stood the château, with gently sloping pastures on one side – the view seeming to leap from field to field, from wood to wood, as far as the heights surrounding Deauville, more than six miles away; on the other side there was a forest that dominated two of the façades, seeming to cuddle the château like a bird's nest in the fork of a tree. A sort of canal ran the length of this forest, bordered on each bank by

avenues of huge thuyas, which joined together to form a bower. Walking beneath it, one had the impression of being in the middle of a cathedral made of greenery. At the end of the thuyas, the canal, which was fed by a spring, became a rivulet that cascaded down and finally emptied into the moat surrounding the château, which was built on a kind of platform reached by crossing two lovely stone bridges.

The château itself, a simple structure built around a tower, had unfortunately been disfigured by extensions added at the end of the last century. A few years later, we had them demolished in order to return the château to its original aspect.

Next to the Portuguese laurel groves adjacent to the cider-press, there was a chapel which Alix restored and decorated with modern stained-glass windows, and where she used to give little concerts for her friends.

Reux inspired the architect and gardener that were dormant in me with a thousand ideas and projects. Today, all the buildings have been restored, the trees are full grown, the stud farm modernized, and Reux is the country home of my son David, his wife and their three children.

Lili, Alix's daughter, very soon became like a daughter of my own, my first-born child, long before becoming a big sister to David, who was born in 1942. An easy child with a happy nature, she was a naturally good student. In America during the war, she went to Brearley, a private girls' school in New York, which she very much enjoyed. Once, however, at the annual ball organized by the students' parents, Lili felt terribly hurt to be excluded from the party because she was Jewish. Alix, not knowing how to console her, promised her revenge, assuring her that she would one day be the only girl in the school to be invited to a party for Princess Elizabeth, the future Queen of England. Sometimes the rash promises we make to children are actually kept! After we all returned to Paris, Lili was indeed presented to Princess Elizabeth, and must have considered it a perfectly natural event.

How can I speak of Alix and Lili without mentioning the faithful Lilah? The daughter of an Austrian and an English woman, she was the nanny of Alix and her sister Minka, then of Lili, and then of David! While her age now prevents her from looking after David's children, she still lives with the family, a fully-fledged member of it and adored by all.

The convergence of sentiments between Alix and myself, the circumstances that had determined our marriage, had obscured the differences of character and behaviour which would lead, much later, to our separation. Already in 1937, with the shadow cast by Hitler over Europe, our world seemed to be coming to an end and the instinct for survival encouraged people to seek emotional security before the storm broke. Basically, we were not made for one another, but we discovered it only later. Alix was

perhaps too similar to me for us to be either partners or accomplices; our tastes, our hopes, our dreams, however, were too dissimilar; our natures and affinities diverged. Alix wished to live her own life . . . Eighteen years later, mine was set on fire, lighting up a new chapter . . .

While Europe was painfully recovering in the thirties from the terrible economic crisis, France continued to play the Sleeping Beauty. This was especially true of her economic activity, her general vitality and her demography. The French political scene, on the other hand, was quite agitated and turbulent.

I was in no way involved in this climate of political combat. However, I did happen to find myself in the centre of a riot once – from my window on the rue Saint-Florentin. It was 6 February 1934, and the spectacle of that outbreak of violence is forever engraved in my memory.

It had taken merely a spark – the Stavisky financial scandal in which certain members of Parliament and the government were implicated – to light the fuse of an explosive mixture of bitterness and discontent resulting from the rise of Fascism, which worried everybody but in which some people refused to see anything but its economic achievements, which were particularly remarkable in Italy.

And so on 6 February, a conservative association of veterans calling itself the Croix de Feu, staged a demonstration that rapidly took an anti-parliamentary turn. An enormous crowd invaded the Place de la Concorde and would have sacked the Palais Bourbon, the seat of Parliament, if police reinforcements and the Army had not promptly intervened.

Soon I heard the sound of gunfire. The police were shooting, people screaming, the panic-stricken crowd surged like an ocean swell, as people tried to run from one side of the square to the other.

Then the mounted police charged the demonstrators. The rioters threw metal balls under the horses' hooves, causing them to slip and fall. Others, even more demented, tried to slash the horses' hocks with razors. A terrifying din rose from the illuminated square, a mixture of cries from the wounded, screams of terror, the trample of hooves on the paving stones, gunfire, the orders of the officers and leaders.

For the first time I witnessed with my own eyes panic, fury, hatred, violence and death – twenty-two dead and two thousand wounded were counted – people fighting against each other. And all night long, terrified, fascinated and thoroughly shaken, I watched the sad and bloody spectacle.

During the next few days, the anarchists and Communists took over, organizing in their turn gigantic counter-demonstrations; law and order seemed to have deserted the city of Paris.

Two years later, the Popular Front triumphed. My family was involun-

tarily involved in these events, not only because of the nationalizations – the railways, as has been seen, was a venture that had attracted the Rothschilds from the start – but especially because of the famous slogan of the 'Two Hundred Families', which designated us as 'scapegoats'. The word is all the more apt in that the leadership of Léon Blum exacerbated the anti-semitism of a certain element in the right wing.

The slogan of the 'Two Hundred Families' seemed justified by a peculiarity in the statutes of the Bank of France (which had not yet been nationalized): only the two hundred most important stockholders had the right to vote at the Annual Meeting. Although their vote gave them no special power, the left-wing propagandists lit upon this detail to convince public opinion that the fate of the nation was in the hands of its two hundred richest citizens. Moreover, my father, as you know, was also a director of the Bank of France. Blum and Rothschild – it certainly looked as if France was controlled by the Jews! This is not the place to reopen the eternal debate in which partisans and adversaries toss back and forth the social reforms and the economic results of the Popular Front. I'd simply like to stress the importance, to my mind primordial, that it assumed in the collective subconscious of the French population, which was more than ever divided into two hostile camps: an importance which largely explains the behaviour of both factions in the face of escalating danger, and especially during the Occupation.

On the one hand, the bourgeoisie experienced one of the most frightening moments of its history. The general strike, the sit-down strikes in factories, unheard-of till then, seemed to presage a veritable revolution; and its power as well as its future seemed to be at stake. This fear engendered a bitterness and aggression in the monied classes that turned them against the leftist parties in general, Léon Blum and the Jews in particular, all tossed into the same basket and accused of being conscious or unconscious servitors of the Communist Devil.

This great fear felt by the 'well-intentioned' conservatives also affected the middle classes, as the shadow of Hitler began to eclipse all of Europe. Since, in the eyes of the most panic-stricken, it was the parliamentary system, decadent and rotten to the core, that was leading the country towards revolution, one began to hear the famous slogan: 'Rather Mussolini or even Hitler, than Stalin!' (And many who dared not express it aloud, believed it in their hearts.) Already anti-semitism mingled with the deep dregs of French xenophobia to reject the fugitives from Hitler's Germany who sought refuge in France.

When war broke out, everyone undoubtedly fulfilled his patriotic duty. But the 'Sacred Union' of 1914 survived only superficially; in general, the bourgeoisie retained at heart an ill-extinguished distrust toward the

'working classes', and nobody, as we know, was ready this time either to 'stick a flower in his gun' or to go and 'die for Danzig'.

Irony of history! The same Léon Blum whom the Action Française accused of being a leader without a country, a leader of the dregs of society and of international Jewry, a bloodthirsty beast, would become after the war, for these very same people, one of the last bastions against Bolshevism. I had the chance to meet him then, and I must admit that I fell completely under the spell of that courteous, distinguished, refined, artistic man, the very model of an idealistic and disinterested intellectual.

With the Popular Front as well as the moderate government that followed it – and in spite of the efforts to restore the economy and rearm as quickly as was possible for a nation in a state of under-industrialization – France was still being run by dusty civil servants and shivering leaders, none of whom had the slightest idea of efficient organization – what the technocrats call 'good management'.

When Nazi Germany invaded Austria in 1938, my cousin Louis de Rothschild was immediately arrested. He was my father's nephew, the son of his elder sister of whom he had been very fond and who had married a Vienna Rothschild. He had always refused to believe in the danger that Nazism represented for all Jews. My father was understandably greatly affected by his arrest and immediately mobilized all the international lawyers in France in order to negotiate his release. Fortunately for my cousin, war had not yet been declared, and Hitler was still trying to keep up appearances. It took one year, but my father's efforts finally bore fruit and Louis was able to come to Paris, after abandoning, without the slightest indemnity, everything he owned.

In Paris, his manner and behaviour led one to believe that he had withstood captivity very well. But one year later, having emigrated to Argentina where he hoped to start a new life, he was injured in a car accident. Half unconscious, he was heard to murmur: 'They finally got me . . . ' Beneath the surface, the nightmare had continued to haunt him.

After Munich, nobody could any longer remain deaf to the approaching sound of marching boots. While it is difficult for today's generation to understand what must seem to them like a shameful capitulation, they should remember two things: the memory of the horrible massacre of 1914–18 was still fresh in people's minds and nobody wanted to believe in the possibility of another war; secondly, France and England seemed to be an invincible alliance, in any case beyond the reach of a recently vanquished nation which was just beginning to re-arm. With the exception of a few enlightened souls, Munich seemed more like the wise refusal of war than the shameful fear of defeat.

In the meantime, the inspired comedian who was governing Germany had begun to stage his perfect psycho-drama, and gave a brilliant performance in his tragedy entitled *One Step at a Time* – swearing, hand on heart, that each step was the last one. The audience was begging to be deceived, when it was not itself acting a role in an English drama, *The Appeasement*, by that very elegant playwright Mr Chamberlain.

Each of us is free to recognize or not those who, in the world today, are playing the same roles, to the applause of the same audience . . .

CHAPTER

6

Forty-five Days

During an elegant dinner party in Paris in the late spring of 1939, Gaston Palewski suddenly drew me aside:

'We must enjoy ourselves one last time,' he said. 'We'll never see this again. Our world is coming to an end.'

His remark astonished me. Like almost everybody else, I was expecting war. But 'the end of the world'! Behind his charming manners and eternal smile, Palewski was a shrewd man. His words upset me.

It's hard for me to remember exactly what were my emotions during the dark days that were to come. Everything I've heard or read since then has finally confused my memories, or clarified in the light of official history the events that I myself lived through. Besides, how can one be an objective witness to oneself when one is but a tiny cog in a gigantic machine gone mad? So I will simply stick to the facts:

In July 1939, before leaving for the summer holidays, I spent a morning at the bank sorting my papers, making separate piles of the dossiers that ought to be evacuated and those which ought to be destroyed. I couldn't bear the thought of enemy eyes prying into my professional and private life through my correspondence and engagement books.

I felt vaguely uneasy. Since Munich, the world had lost its blind optimism.

That summer Alix was recovering from a miscarriage and we'd decided to cruise along the coast of Corsica for a few days. Towards the end of August, we were in the bay of Calvi and I was listening to the radio when I heard an oddly-phrased, hazy news bulletin concerning some agreement between Hitler and Stalin. I dashed to the post office to telephone Paris, but was told that only official calls could be put through. The implication was obvious and ominous. That same evening we set sail for the mainland; since our sailor was sick, I held the helm all night long and steered straight into St Tropez the next morning. The holiday crowd was all rushing back to Paris and there was no transport left. Fortunately, my cousin Cécile, who had been staying in her nearby villa, offered to make room for us in

her car. When we arrived the following evening, the mobilization numbers had already been posted, mine among them. The next morning I joined up, and a few days later war was declared.

There are war stories galore in books, in films and on television, depicting warfare in Vietnam, in Europe, in the Middle East; battles on land, on sea and in the air, prisoners of war, escapes, heroic deeds, death, treachery, lucky survivals, and countless other situations, plots, places and times all over the world and throughout history. Why add my little tale to all of this? The story of 'my war' is very similar to that of many of my compatriots, with the exception of a few unusual incidents; and yet I feel compelled to give an account of those five years because they turned out to be in many ways a dominant experience and a determining factor in my life.

In the first place, the young man I was then (I was thirty) who had led a life of leisure with every possible facility and protection, although too serious by nature to be a playboy, was plunged overnight into a totally opposite life: a life of ruthless danger, chaos, unpredictability, with no protection other than one's own wits, fortitude and good luck. Above all, it was a revolutionary experience involving political judgement, posing moral dilemmas; being separated from one's home, one's country, one's civilization, one's past, one's loyalties, one's affections . . . and being thrown into a strange, unreal world of adventure, heading nowhere, cut off from all previous ties and roots. The same war was quite a different battle for an American, whose home was unscathed and unthreatened, or for an Englishman, fighting for the survival of his country, than it was for a continental European who had lost his country and didn't know if he would ever return to it; it was a different problem in a different context that created different anxieties.

When I joined my regiment at the end of August 1939, I was a full cavalry lieutenant, but our horses had been replaced by half-tracks and motorcycles. I was put in charge of a platoon of requisitioned side-cars of all types and makes, which tended to set off with a lurch and a loud bang and then stall. In not much more than a week, an entire division had been assembled, equipped, armed and sent on its way. It was called the 3rd Light Mechanized Division, and was composed of an armoured brigade, a few tanks, some artillery and two regiments of dragoons to which I belonged. These units, although motorized, were called upon to fulfil typical cavalry missions: moving far and fast, prepared for sudden engagements on wide fronts until reinforcements could come up and take over on a large scale.

Our first move took us to a bleak agricultural village in open farmland halfway to Belgium. There we started training, which meant learning and

rehearsing all the activities that a not over-imaginative staff assigned to us. Life was very spartan during that autumn and winter: getting up at 6 a.m., being occupied all day long with roll-calls, parades, fatigues, marches, weapon practice, motor repairs, instruction of all kinds. Evenings were short in the officer's mess, where we talked and, I suppose, repeated the same stories over and over again. From time to time we went to the town of Saint-Quentin, fifteen miles away, but it was so ugly and dull that it held really no attraction.

During the winter of 1940, all the officers of our Army Corps were summoned to a lecture by Colonel Touny, who was in charge of Intelligence. I was amazed to find that he knew the name of every enemy unit facing us in Germany, and I can remember how explicitly he insisted on the high quality of the morale, training, equipment and efficiency of the German army. He was a first-rate officer, who joined the Resistance after the fall of France and was eventually killed. His speech was all the more significant because civilians and army alike were in the throes of an absurd complacency which tended to make them believe that, behind their shiny façade, the Germans were suffering from every sort of shortage and weakness. It was the so-called 'phoney war', which France and England had declared but were unable to wage; their governments were unwilling to fight, while the Germans wanted everyone to believe they had no hostile intentions and were being forced into a situation they had neither contrived nor desired.

It's amazing how quickly the human mind develops a false sense of security when one's fears do not materialize immediately. None of us ever imagined the inferno that would soon break loose; neither could we imagine, twenty years after the triumph of 1918, that our Army had not conserved its potential for victory.

As autumn dragged into a cold winter, we moved a couple of times to other villages. I was transferred from the motorcycles to a half-track platoon, and because one of the other reserve officers fell ill and had to leave, I was placed in command of an entire company: four platoons, a machine-gun section, and an administrative office – in all, two hundred men; I was acting captain. It was, I believe, meant to be temporary, but it lasted till the end of the fighting on 25 June. Meanwhile, we'd been given suitable new transport and, all in all, we were not a bad outfit.

After four months' duty, it was my turn for ten days' leave, which I spent partly in Normandy, where my wife and her daughter had been evacuated. Then we joined my parents in Paris, and everything seemed like paradise, marred only by the thought that every day brought me closer to my departure and to another exile from those I loved and from my normal environment. It was more reminiscent of boarding-school than a war.

Paris seemed very much its usual self: gay, carefree, seething with rumour and intrigue, happy, amusing and most un-warlike. After the long winter came the spring, and I got a short leave which I spent with my family on the Riviera. Clearly, we were further and further away from real war.

On 10 May, I was awakened by explosions, shouting, and in a minute realized that 'This is it. We're in it.' The order came at once. We packed, lined up in a column, and finally got under way in the early afternoon. One of my men, sitting in a half-track, became hysterical; a senior officer advised me to take no notice but to keep him where he was lest his reaction become contagious. After an hour or two we crossed into Belgium. The customs-house was deserted, but soon afterwards we went through a village that had just been bombed, and I saw a man carrying a little boy covered with blood and plaster. I exchanged a grim glance with the liaison motorcyclist next to my car. Our drive was finally uneventful, and we were ordered to set up for the night in a forest.

It might be useful at this point for me to summarize briefly the overall French strategy and the way the Germans countered it, in order to understand the unforeseen events which affected the First Army group to which my division belonged.

The French General Headquarters (GHQ) believed that our fortified Maginot Line protected us on the east, and assigned only the minimum troops required to man the defences. To the north was the river Meuse, surrounded by the thickly wooded Ardennes, an area considered unsuited to extensive military operations, so that the troops disposed there were neither very numerous nor were they the best. Further to the north, there were no defences along the Belgian border; it was therefore in this vulnerable area that the French Generals posted the majority of the Army and the élite of their forces.

On 10 May 1940, as predicted, Germany attacked Belgium, and the First Army group was rushed north to stop them. But ten Panzer divisions, led by Rommel and Guderian, under massive air support, attacked through the Ardennes near Sedan, where they were opposed by the weakest elements of the French army. Having opened a breach, German armour headed south towards Paris for a few days, then veered north again to thus encircle the Anglo-French army, the bulk of our forces. From then on, the faster-moving Germans were always one or more steps ahead, and the Anglo-French army, facing south and east instead of north, remained consolidated but was pushed towards the sea until the improvised evacuation at Dunkirk.

Ever since the morning of 10 May I had felt the excitement, even the

thrill of adventure, of action, of the unknown. It should be remembered that my generation had been brought up on endless tales of trench warfare, of Verdun, of infantry attacks ending in holocausts – in short, of the glorious history of World War I. Every man fifteen to thirty years older than me had been involved in it and, from a distance, seemed to be a hero. All the older officers of my Regiment had fought in World War I. Now it was my turn to be like them, and I knew that I could face it. I also knew that many of us would not survive, but I refused to think of my own fate and, in a way, was curious to know what this great experience, so superabundantly described, really felt like. Beneath my excitement, there was anxiety, but not real fear. Being responsible towards one's men, towards one's superiors, not knowing the routine of the new game and keeping very much on one's toes, mobilizes one's ego and leaves little room for fear.

Lying on the ground that night, I had no sleep. I never knew before how cold it can be at night in early spring, even after a lovely sunny day.

The next morning, we moved to positions which had been chosen for us, in front of a stream that was supposed to be an anti-tank ditch. It was in a hollow, where one felt helpless; whereas on high ground, if there was cover, one had the feeling of dominating the situation and being able to utilize one's weapons.

My company was assigned a front of over half a mile, so that each platoon was too far from the next to see anything of it or even to keep in touch. I myself was two or three hundred yards back from the centre of the front, in order to maintain communications with all four platoons and with the commander of my battalion. All of this was established in the midst of unimaginable confusion caused by streams of civilian refugees on foot, in horse-drawn vehicles, in motor cars, as well as stragglers from the Belgian army. Hovering overhead were enemy observation planes, virtually unchallenged, although one was shot down not far from me. I went and recovered the pilot's camera, his papers and wallet (with the photo of a young girl in it, poor fellow), and naïvely delivered it all to the Battalion HQ, as if it contained some vital war secret.

Less than a mile away German Stukas, the dive bombers, were attacking some target, I don't know what. The noise of the engine accelerating during the dive, the sound of the explosion that followed, the sight of the plane heading for what seemed to be oneself, was really terrifying and eerie.

Amid the stream of refugees, I spotted a German soldier whom I caught hold of, loaded into my liaison side-car, and delivered to the nearest HQ. He was a meek little man, a peasant type; when I asked him in the few

words of German that Alix had taught me if he belonged to the Storm Troopers, he nearly collapsed with fright at the very thought. As the flow of refugees diminished, a rather too well-dressed Belgian staff officer sauntered up and asked me what the situation was. He seemed suspicious to me – there had been so much talk about a Fifth Column – and I brusquely sent him away.

Night followed day and still no sign of the enemy. We held our positions, which meant practically no sleep – it was getting to be a habit. At dawn, some of my men imagined that the haystacks in the adjacent fields were moving, and that they must conceal German soldiers ready to make a sneak attack on us. But it was only nerves. Later in the day we heard a lot of gunfire and I received a written message from Battalion HQ informing me that the company on my left was heavily engaged. This left me very puzzled because, as hard as I tried to remember everything I'd been taught during my military training, I had no idea of what action, if any, I should take. So I did nothing but send a warning on to my extreme left unit, and as it turned out, it was the right thing to do. A little later the order came to move back a few miles; I was lucky to have my motorcyclists to get through to my platoons and deliver the message. As we joined up behind a village in the rear, I heard violent explosions which got closer as we reached the village itself. It was only then that I realized it was our own artillery firing. Never before had I heard the sound; it was a new and comforting experience. As all the components of my company got together, machine-gun fire broke out at both ends of the main street; but since we moved on, I never did learn who was involved in the shooting.

After all these years, I cannot give a detailed account of our various moves during the next ten days, nor would it be of any interest. The general picture, however, was harrowing. From a purely military viewpoint, I can understand that our highly mobile division was continually being used to plug gaps in the general retreat, and to exert a delaying action for the benefit of slower-moving troops. The Germans had broken through our lines 100 miles to the south, and they had moved up towards the sea, so that we were encircled and continually harassed by the enemy's efforts to close in on us. Everything was happening so fast; hardly had we taken up a position than we were ordered to move elsewhere. In one instance, we were facing a canal and were told it would be a last-ditch defence, and that all of us would probably be killed by noon. The day passed, however, in complete peace, and that evening we were off again. We generally moved at night because of enemy air activity, holding static positions during the daylight hours.

It seems incredible today that our only means of communication was by

motorcyclist, and that during this phase of the war I never even glimpsed a radio set. In spite of our complete lack of information, I must have finally realized what was happening, because on 12 May one of my NCOs returned from Battalion HQ with a comment from our Major: 'With our French army it's always the same: we start off with a disaster and end in victory.' To which I replied instinctively, 'Yes, like Sedan in 1870 . . .', referring to Napoleon III's final defeat before the Prussians conquered France and occupied Paris.

During the three weeks following 10 May, from the start of the German offensive until the exodus at Dunkirk, I slept at the most two hours a night, while we were on the move and when I didn't have to follow the map so as not to lose our way in total darkness. I must add for the record that no unit of my regiment ever went astray or ever failed to perform its assigned mission on time.

The impression of all this, when one lived through it, was a mixture of chaos and danger. It is, I believe, a constant of war that troops of all sorts and denominations are intermingled so that, in apparent utter confusion, no one knows anyone else, everyone is going in every direction, and it all appears to be an inextricable, aimless mess. The bulk of our troops were infantry, walking day and night, haggard and stumbling with exhaustion, who cut a sad figure in comparison with a motorized unit like ours. Day and night, the roads were still jammed with fleeing civilians, carrying the pathetic remnants of their possessions, sometimes on their backs or in overloaded prams. My heart bled for the children who were dragged along in this nightmarish and futile flight to nowhere.

At one point we passed a lonely farm, where the owner was piling a mountain of belongings into two huge carts. I tried to convince him and his family that the risks he ran in leaving were far greater than in staying put, and that nothing terrible would happen to them if they remained on their farm. I think I finally persuaded him, since they started to unpack; and if they followed my advice, I hope it was to their benefit and that I did at least one good deed that day.

In another instance, one of my cousins was driving through a village that had just been bombed and inquired of the inhabitants if there had been any casualties. 'Oh, no, thank God,' came the cheerful reply, 'only military.' I suppose we were no more human, but we certainly were not Gods.

The following experience gives an idea of the hardships involved in that massive exodus: as I was driving through a forest, I came across a group of people gathered by the roadside. It seemed that a pregnant woman had started to deliver her baby there in the countryside; fortunately, two nuns

were called from a nearby hamlet and had attended to the mother and child.

A far less dramatic incident occurred later, when I was nearing Paris on my way back from Dunkirk and England. Amid the stream of refugees, I noticed a middle-aged couple, the man carrying a cello in its case. They needed petrol for their car. I couldn't resist telling him that I was Piatigorsky's brother-in-law, and I found a way of helping him out. He could not have been more astounded than if Zeus and Moses had appeared out of a cloud, hand in hand, to offer him a jerrycan!

As I've said, our brains were dulled from lack of sleep, and our nerves consequently on edge. The enemy air force reigned unchallenged in the sky, which added to the uncanniness. Whenever bombers flew overhead, especially at night, we feared, inexperienced as we were, that they knew we were there and were about to dive down and kill us. Since we lived in constant fear of Fifth Column treason, any light however distant was assumed to be an enemy signal, which only added to our worries. Moreover, if a vehicle broke down and couldn't be repaired at once, the passengers who didn't immediately jump into the following vehicle were lost and eventually captured, just as anyone who went astray for one reason or another was lost forever.

In such chaotic conditions, nobody ever knew why he was there, where he was going next, for what purpose or for how long. We were never informed of the general situation, nor of what our commanders were trying to achieve. I remember that, having taken a position along yet another canal with my platoons widely dispersed, I received a message saying that the men were terrified of getting lost and wanted to be reassured by my presence that I was looking after them. Another element added to the gloom of the atmosphere: most of the cows had been abandoned in the fields by their fleeing owners, and were therefore unmilked. Those unfortunate beasts suffered agony and moaned continually, creating a nerve-wracking and mournful background to our plight.

Lest the reader think that the battle of Northern France was nothing but one huge traffic snarl, I will relate two incidents.

One night, we were in a wood and Battalion HQ was a mile or two away in a hamlet of half a dozen houses. Towards midnight, I heard machine-gun fire, which was most unusual, and received a message ordering me to proceed to headquarters. There I found that the Germans had infiltrated our position, seriously wounding our commander, a Major, and killing the men around him, before quickly withdrawing. And then, once more, we were ordered to move on.

The other incident proved fatal to many of us. On the morning of 26 May, we were taken to a town called Carvin and informed that the

Germans had crossed a canal two miles away and had occupied a mining village half a mile from us. Our mission was to launch an attack from the outskirts of Carvin across the flat open land towards the mining village and push the enemy back over the canal. I climbed to the artillery observation post at the top of the church steeple to have a good look. I was told that when we started to attack, we'd be supported by the tanks (I think there were one or two of them left) and by the artillery (which, alas, consisted of one solitary 75mm gun). I made my men lie flat in the kitchen gardens bordering the open land, according to Army Manual instructions. At my signal, we launched the attack. But we'd hardly advanced more than ten or twenty yards when the Germans opened an artillery barrage of 77mm shells that exploded in the air a few feet above our heads, hurtling the shrapnel straight down on us, instead of exploding upon contact with the ground. It was far more terrifying and dangerous. I saw my men waver, and flatten on the ground again, as if stunned. Without hesitation, I jumped up shouting, 'Follow me!' – and led them through hell. This consisted of running a few paces, throwing oneself to the ground, then up and forward again – a technique which, although more effective in the face of machine-gun fire than of shelling from above, reduces the time during which one is most vulnerable. After so many days of strain, I was soon exhausted and breathless. One shell buried itself a foot away from my face as I was lying flat – and failed to explode! I leaped to my feet, feeling temporarily very lucky, and put my foot in the crater in a gesture of defiance. Just before reaching the end of the open terrain, I splashed into a puddle of liquid manure. A minor mishap, but I must have been even more tense than I remember, because it infuriated me.

I finally reached the village and kicked open the first door I found, not realizing that my face was blackened by gunpowder. Pointing my revolver at the trembling people in the basement, I asked if there were any Germans present. They said 'No' and I asked for water. Never in all my life have I been served so quickly!

I then moved to a spot from where I could observe the state of my company and of the one on my left. I had launched the attack with 135 men, and I could count only two or three dozen survivors; it looked as if things were no better in my neighbouring company. While I was summing up the situation, two of my best NCOs stood on either side of me. In a matter of seconds, both their heads were blown off by machine-gun fire from the house directly opposite; they died instantly, without a sound. By this time, our lone tank which was just behind me, fired into a window of the house – presumably to good effect, since I stayed there, trying to regroup my men, without being fired upon again.

I observed the same tragedy strike other men of mine in one of the

streets, and could see that it was obviously impossible to fight the enemy out of the village, with so little means at our disposal. So, together with my fellow officer, we decided to return to Carvin and succeeded in doing so, under constant fire. From my original squadron, there remained only thirty-five men. I was told by the trusted NCO whom I'd left in charge of the rear that nobody had fled during the attack, the missing had all been either wounded or killed.

Back on the outskirts of Carvin, I managed to contact the Regimental HQ, made my dire report and requested instructions. When I put my hand in the pocket of the trenchcoat I was wearing, I pulled out a piece of shrapnel two or three inches long. How it got there without injuring me or even damaging the coat, remains one of the minor mysteries of World War II.

At dusk, the sky turned black and a violent thunderstorm erupted; haystacks in the open field were struck by lightning and went up in flames. It seemed like the beginning of the end of the world, as the Germans in the distance started to close in. At this point, a young doctor I'd met once before arrived from Regimental HQ and told me he had orders to go into the field and attend to the wounded. I had to forbid him to do any such thing, as it meant certain death for him and no relief for the wounded. He left – and after the war he gave me a book with the inscription: 'To Guy de Rothschild, to whom I owe my life'. He was the famous French Communist author, Louis Aragon.

At last, orders came to join the regiment elsewhere. Our action had delayed the enemy for a day.

Carvin was my first close contact with death. Those who say that there are two things nobody can face directly: sun and death – must be wrong, because I was awarded the Croix de Guerre with palm a short while later.

In fact, Carvin was a sad episode typical of the entire campaign: courage, losses, initial advance, lack of means to pursue it and, finally, retreat.

One day while I was walking alone along a canal in the late afternoon in order to contact the neighbouring company, I heard an engine roar and a plane came into sight at tree-top level. I could distinctly make out the swastika, as it flew only a few yards above my head. It banked, and I presumed that the greedy pilot wanted one more item for his score of the day. I hardly had time to throw myself into a shallow ditch, when I was sprayed by a blast of machine-gun fire which hit just in front of me and just behind. I was furious, and thumbed my nose at my personal enemy, who by then had disappeared. A second later, the peaceful beauty of the spring twilight made this fleeting encounter seem meaningless and unreal.

At the start of the campaign, my battalion had included twenty-seven officers; but after the Carvin episode, only three of us remained, all the

others having been killed or wounded. Paul Reynaud, the French Prime Minister at that time, announced in a radio broadcast that our Northern Army group had been cut off by superior enemy forces, and advised all French families who had a beloved relative in it to bid him goodbye forever.

While I did not personally hear his words, all of us were quite aware of the perilous situation we were in, and I was determined to do everything possible to avoid being taken prisoner; I'd hide in woods and barns, walk by night and try to slip through the German lines into friendly territory.

Things turned out differently, however, because after three more days of moving and taking up new positions, I received a message one evening ordering our immediate departure for Dunkirk, some 25 miles away by then. It was a pitch-black night. After giving the necessary orders, I set off in my car to inform my friend who was in charge of the remaining half of our battalion. He had had the same idea, and the result was a violent head-on collision. His car was smashed, so was my nose. Everyone piled into my car and off we went. When we reached the main road, we could see at once that the trek to Dunkirk was a monumental traffic jam. I gave the order to abandon transport, and we walked – with an occasional hitch-hike. I escaped by an inch being run over by a piece of artillery on which my coat got caught. It took us almost 24 hours to reach Dunkirk, where we were stationed in the sand dunes above the harbour.

Looking back on those hectic three weeks, I marvel at the fact that we never ran short of petrol, we never got lost or completely out of touch with the rest of our regiment and division, that the seemingly senseless orders we received actually filled the purpose of waging a rearguard action, whether under enemy pressure or not. We never lacked food, because the mobile field kitchens functioned remarkably well, feeding us at night as well as when we passed through countless abandoned villages; while never indulging in plunder, we took from open food stores enough to keep us going and to compensate for our lack of sleep.

We must have spent two days on the dunes of Dunkirk, where I resumed my lifelong routine of daily exercise. Observing the constant bombing of the harbour, we wondered whether we'd get out, and if so, how. In fact, the evacuation began on 26 May and lasted until 4 June. Eight hundred and fifty boats of all sizes were involved, transporting to England nearly 350,000 soldiers, including 200,000 British. On the third night, we were marched in close formation down to the docks. At daybreak there were thousands of men, waiting like us. The British, quite naturally, had priority, and we saw large formations of their troops moving towards the harbour as we waited impatiently. A few grumbles were heard among the

ranks, but if the officers in a unit are real leaders who show no fear (even though they may feel it), discipline remains intact.

On 1 June, we finally marched down to the ships, which ranged from destroyers to tiny private pleasure boats. On all of them the skipper was bellowing at us to hurry aboard any vessel, but quickly, since the air bombardment had resumed. I chose an old destroyer; there were hundreds of us crowded together on the deck. During the Channel crossing, a German bomber came up from behind and I could clearly see the black belly of the bomb that hurtled towards me – and fell in the water alongside. As our anti-aircraft gun fired shell after shell, I held my injured nose, which throbbed with every bang. On that particular day, three destroyers were sunk by enemy bombs, and the loss of planes, men and *matériel* was the heaviest of the entire Dunkirk evacuation.

We landed at Dover and joined a long queue that wound all the way through the maritime station used in happier days for the Golden Arrow boat train between London and Paris. At one point, each man was given a bun and a postcard, after which they had to find their way back to their respective units. Seized by a sudden inspiration, I left the queue to look for the station post office; it was open, and I sent a telegram to my wife in Normandy, telling her of my safe landing in England. Incredible as it may seem, with the German Army near to Rouen, the cable was delivered – which only goes to prove that when everything is falling apart in a shambles, trivial routine continues to the very end.

The English scene at that time was totally different from the one we'd left behind: young people were playing cricket and golf or peacefully lounging about on lawns; everyone seemed carefree and relaxed. Their only acknowledgement of the war was in cheering the trainloads of evacuees as if they were returning heroes. It was rather frightening to see such lack of understanding of a tragic situation.

We were given no respite, but herded into a train for Plymouth, where a troop transport was waiting to take us to Brest. We slept on deck during the voyage, but the nervous strain of the past weeks had been so great that most of the men woke up screaming in the night, dreaming that they had been taken prisoner. From Brest, we were sent to Evreux in Normandy, and then to the Chevreuse Valley, ten miles west of Paris, where we were equipped with men and *matériel* and a new regiment was formed.

After the defeat, the Vichy government made much of the allegedly inadequate English military effort; the British had sent ten divisions to France, compared to sixty in World War I. The truth is that they were even less prepared for war than we were. Some people were also irritated by the priority given to the British during the Dunkirk evacuation, but this

was only natural, since France was obviously lost and British survival remained the only hope for all.

While we were in Normandy, I was able to visit my wife for twenty-four hours; the rest of the family had left for Bordeaux, but she had stayed on hoping to see me. She was the first civilian to congratulate me on the Croix de Guerre I'd been awarded while camping on the dunes of Dunkirk.

Our new unit was still part of the same 3rd Light Mechanized Division commanded by the same General from start to finish, a wonderful officer who held his unit together and nursed it as best he could through thick and thin with infinite care and devotion.

We left, moving westward, on the same day that the Germans entered Paris and, as in Flanders, we took up positions, moved on, and then started the same procedure all over again. We reached Angers and then headed south. The rumour was spread that the government had declared all cities of more than 30,000 inhabitants 'open cities', in order to avoid bombardment. Our General told me later that the night during which I'd held all of the bridges over the Loire in Angers, his German counterpart had managed to reach him by telephone; he had heard the same rumours and wished to know the status of Angers. Our General agreed that it should be declared an open city, and that our troops would therefore be withdrawn immediately. After a brief argument about the time required for withdrawal, they agreed on a time schedule which avoided a clash between the two forces. For once there was a brief revival of chivalry in war.

Our march south took us to Angoulême, which we reached one day at noon. Asleep in my car, I was awakened by a cry, 'Don't shoot!' There was a German revolver under my nose. Our regiment had been moving in one long column, taking no precautions, and we were unaware that a German armoured car detachment had got ahead of us; as we came around a blind curve, we found ourselves face to face with the enemy. In order to give battle, we would have had to get out of the vehicles, take up our arms and disperse. The Germans were blocking our route. They shunted the column up a lane through the fields, at the end of which they had installed a machine-gun nest. The column came to a halt. It was clear that there were Germans at both ends, but nowhere in between. We all got out of our vehicles and I ordered my men to join me in escaping through the countryside. Most of them followed me, although a few of the recent recruits, believing that the show was over and that the Germans would demobilize them sooner than the French, preferred surrender – and as a result suffered for four years in prisoner-of-war camps.

We marched all afternoon. At nightfall it started to rain when we stopped, exhausted, at the poorest of farms. It was there that we heard over

the radio Pétain's bleating voice announce the Armistice, to take effect at midnight. We somehow managed to contact Division Headquarters to ask for transport in order to rejoin our forces. By midnight large trucks arrived; we boarded them and set off, headlights blazing, because there was no risk now.

I was sitting next to the driver of the leading vehicle. Undoubtedly exhausted by many sleepless nights, he must have dozed off at the wheel, because he failed to take a turn on the winding forest road, and we overturned in the forest. All the men behind me were seriously wounded; one was dead. With the help of the others, we buried the unlucky casualty, loaded the rest in the remaining transport, and arrived at Division HQ at about 5 a.m. To the great credit of the medical corps, all of the wounded were attended to there and then, including casting broken shoulders and administering morphine.

At about 6 a.m., the doctor and his assistant – who was none other than my friend Louis Aragon – took me to their room and gave me a veritable political lecture about what Laval meant in the Pétain government, what policy of collaboration would be pursued, what would be the fate of the Jews, and so forth. Thanks to them, I was fully alerted to every ensuing development, and fully aware of what to expect and what to fear. Looking back, this impromptu lesson seems to me a remarkable demonstration of political knowledge and insight.

After which, dead tired, I fell asleep on the floor.

Thus ended the first phase of the war, after several months of stagnation and forty-five days of blitzkrieg. France was defeated, and it was the worst defeat of her long history. The country was invaded, at first partly and later entirely occupied by an enemy who controlled all of its administrative and political activities, deflected towards its own war effort the output of French industry and agriculture, left the population unheated in winter, grossly underfed all year round, with virtually no motor transport and nearly two million able-bodied men held prisoner.

The reasons for the collapse were above all military, and have since been analysed very thoroughly. It was partly due to obsolete strategic and tactical planning, partly to a poor choice of armaments, partly to production delays, partly to inept utilization of existing means in men and *matériel*. For example, we had a very large number of excellent tanks, but they were dispersed all over the country instead of being used in large formations. De Gaulle's teachings had gone unheeded. Similar errors were made with our Air Force. Furthermore, during the last years of the Third Republic, Parliament constantly overruled the government, so that appointments such as Chief of Staff had to be approved by the political

parties, a system hardly liable to bring to the fore the most forceful leaders.

Now that forty years have elapsed, I feel able to draw certain conclusions from the personal point of view of a troop officer, based on what I saw, what I experienced and what I felt:

The first question I faced was: would I have the courage and stamina to behave well in the face of stress and danger? I discovered that it was quite different from what one imagines in peacetime. One is engulfed in a huge machine, and as merely one of its cogs, one could hardly stop it from revolving. Then, one is shaken out of one's routine, one is tired, at times exhausted, while underlying everything is the sense of destruction: destruction of organized society, destruction of property, of material, of life.

Generally speaking, when situations of great peril arise, one is preconditioned to act according to plan; one's bewilderment diminishes the instinct for self-preservation, and the normal urging of one's conscience to fulfil one's responsibility, along with the fear of shame if one fails to do so, becomes greater than the fear of death. This is the behaviour that is commonly called 'courage'. In my view, an absence of fear, an attraction to danger to the point of going out of one's way to perform heroic deeds, has always seemed an indication of a total lack of imagination – the inability to visualize bits of one's poor little self blown all over the countryside – if not of an incurable suicidal neurosis.

The military defeat of France was so spectacular that it tended to give the impression that the French had turned tail and run away. It's true that units which were cut up and surrounded by the enemy lost all means of fighting, and some gave up or retreated, if they could. But there were many others, like my own division, which remained orderly and disciplined and suffered great losses. During the crucial two weeks of battle, the French lost 92,000, a rate of destruction of which the veterans of World War I would have been proud. In fact, on every occasion during those 45 days when the units were engaged intelligently, usefully, and under the command of good officers, the French soldier was in no way inferior to his World War I predecessors. And this includes missions of self-sacrifice, such as those carried out by the soldiers who took over the defence of Dunkirk from the British, and resisted until they were either killed or captured.

At the time of the Armistice and during the years that followed, some people found it hard to understand the French refusal to send the fleet and some forces to North Africa, in order to continue the fight from there. But I think one should be conscious of the fact that France was still a backward country; even its industrial sector was far inferior to that of England and Germany.

Industry had created an urban population of workers, foremen and managers, but this group was only a minority in France, and its thinking and philosophy were still foreign to the Establishment, which basically considered the country as a nation of small land-owners, farmers and peasants on the one hand, and of civil servants and soldiers on the other, just as in the early 19th century.

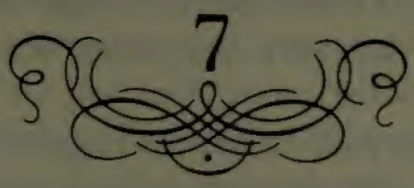
At the time of total military defeat, men such as Pétain and Weygand, who were as anti-German as anybody, could not see any sense in continuing the combat from outside France. In their instinctive, down-to-earth view of France, there was nothing left to defend once the country had been overrun, since the sole purpose of all the wars of the previous millennium had been to prevent that very catastrophe. To those who could not foresee the formidable potential of the Anglo-American alliance, it seemed wishful thinking to imagine that a continental country like Germany could one day be defeated by outside military forces. Napoleon had not been defeated by England alone, but by a coalition with continental Europeans. Only Russia remained, but it had betrayed us a few months earlier. Old-fashioned French officers could not visualize global planetary war.

I'm afraid that some of our nuclear thinking today is based on a similar philosophy, that is, to defend France and make its territory a sanctuary. As if this would be of any use, with the rest of Europe destroyed or enslaved!

Historians will long debate the question of whether or not the 1940 Armistice finally served a useful purpose, and whether or not the fate of the country would have been much worse if the fleet and the remaining Air Force had been sent to a territory under Vichy French control, but beyond Hitler's reach, or even if it had joined the British forces.

At the time, as bewildered and shocked as everybody else, I didn't even question the justifications for the Armistice nor was I aware of the high-level discussions that preceded it. I think, however, that had I been asked at the time, I would have reluctantly approved, if only because it spared so many soldiers from capture, gave so many citizens time to hide or to escape. Swept away as we were by an irresistible cyclone and immersed in the flood of defeat, we needed at least a little respite in order to catch our breath and to muster our courage.

CHAPTER



Jewish under Pétain

Cut off from the world, I didn't know where Alix and my parents were. I had to wait two or three weeks – interminable, wasted hours – before being demobilized.

My family had certainly succeeded in escaping from the Germans, but where were they? Had they been able to get out of Europe, and if so what was their destination? When the postal system finally began to function again, I sent a telegram to my sister Jacqueline, who lived in New York, and learned that my father and mother had succeeded in joining her there. My wife and her daughter, as well as other members of my family, were sailing towards Argentina.

All I could do at this point was to return to the family headquarters at the bank, try to find out more about the situation, and follow the outcome of events under the new governmental régime in Vichy, keeping in mind the bleak warning I had received.

With his serene expression, his white hair and innocent blue eyes, Pétain was the very image of the defender of widows and orphans. I'd met him once during a shooting party at Ferrières. He seemed rather shy and unassuming. During one beat, he'd said to my mother that he didn't deserve the honour of her presence at his side because he was, as he awkwardly excused himself, 'too bad a shot'.

While I had no preconceived opinion of Pétain, I instinctively distrusted all military men in government. After our return from Dunkirk via England, my relationship with the new commander of my battalion had left me with an odd feeling: although he was friendly and perfectly correct in every way, his prematurely Maurrassian and Pétainist attitude made me ill at ease. His vague allusions to penitence and virtue had a hypocritical ring; his irritability with anything resembling idle discussion, which reminded him of politics and parliamentarians, led me to believe that there was something about him that was not my cup of tea. Later on, during my first few visits to Vichy, this impression was confirmed by the

sight of all those military officers, still rather arrogant and pretentious, in spite of the defeat. Even if I'd been able to forget what Aragon had told me, I had the feeling from the very beginning that Vichy was something foreign and hostile.

All vanquished nations tend to see the hand of God in their misery and envisage their salvation only through redemption, with an implication of virtuous, spartan behaviour. For many people, the devil in the allegory was obviously personified by the Popular Front and the 'corrupt' left-wing parties. The punishment of God was due not only to the former government leaders, but also to all who had voted for them and thus shared their guilt. Pétain and his administration seemed to be the instrument of this divine vengeance, which would deliver the nation not only from the danger of Communism, but also from foreign influence – in particular, from that of the Jews. Mortification, submission to an irreproachable leader, were the almost religious themes which struck a cord in the hearts of all.

I would have been justified in joining the swelling wave of criticism against the Popular Front. It had, after all, attacked my family, listing it among the first of the famous Two Hundred Families as class enemies, along with many others; it had nationalized the Bank of France, of which my father was a director, as well as the railways belonging to the network of the Compagnie du Nord. But nothing in this world is ever all black or all white, and I refused to consider Blum, Daladier or Reynaud responsible for our present misfortunes.

I didn't hear de Gaulle's famous radio broadcast from London on 18 June, and nobody around me spoke of it. However, towards the end of July, the rumour spread that de Gaulle had appealed to all French citizens to refrain from going out in the streets between noon and one o'clock on a certain day, as a sign of passive resistance. I happened to be in Aix-en-Provence at the time, and I made a point of staying indoors during that hour, feeling something akin to pride in accomplishing this symbolic gesture – not allegiance to de Gaulle, but at least a manifestation of moral resistance.

Demobilized at last, I learned that my cousins Alain and Elie were prisoners in Germany.

I then embarked on an interminable roundabout journey to reach La Bourboule, near Clermont-Ferrand, passing through Limoges and Auch, where I stayed with an officer friend; I had to take five or six different trains before I reached my destination.

The bank was already installed in La Bourboule, with one or two members of the family, most of the staff, its books and accounts.

Everything had gone smoothly; the new offices had been leased the day after Munich, on the advice of the Bank of France, which had already selected Châtel-Guyon as its own evacuation site.

Fillon and Langlois, my two assistants, had established a communication system with Marin-Darbel, a member of our staff who had remained in Paris. The rue Laffitte had been requisitioned by the Secours National, a new government social service agency, but the bank still kept a few offices there, and seven or eight employees. Every two weeks, Marin-Darbel managed to send us a memorandum, thanks to the services of Underground *passeurs*, who were adept at sneaking across the demarcation line.

It's hard to remember now the feelings of people whose homes had been occupied by the enemy if not destroyed, who suddenly found themselves demobilized in that small portion of France that was left to them. After the anguish of war, the fear of death, the terror of captivity, we almost had a feeling of relief, we found a certain form of freedom again. The national disaster was too immense to measure right away. We were on familiar land, united with our compatriots, although separated from all of our previous attachments: human, material, geographic, economic. The future was at best a gaping pit. 'A foreigner in my own country' . . . but in no way a foreigner to my country.

It was reassuring to meet an acquaintance, a relative, a friend again – like the beginning of a return to real life, a return to normal, a straw of security.

Before the war, I had a perfectly clear idea of what a police régime was like, more from accounts of the situation in Germany than of what was happening in Soviet Russia. Never did I feel that kind of oppression in the Free Zone, nor – perhaps mistakenly – did I fear surveillance by the French police. I was too much of a mind with my compatriots to even think about it; besides, the Vichy government seemed so wretched, so inefficient, that I couldn't believe it capable of installing a reign of terror. But the Germans – that was something different. In the Occupied Zone, Philippe de Rothschild's wife, née Lili de Chambure, who was not Jewish, neither by birth nor by religion, had considered herself perfectly safe. But merely because of her husband's name, the unfortunate woman was arrested and died during deportation to Ravensbrück. After the occupation of the southern, previously Free Zone, nearly all the members of my family on my mother's side were deported and died.

La Bourboule was a charming town situated on the banks of a torrential river, surrounded by mountains of medium altitude, with a rather severe climate: rainy in summer, bitterly cold in winter.

There wasn't much to do. I divided my time between the villa we lived

in and the office, which was installed in a former hotel. It was fairly pleasant, but not at all convenient.

Some members of the family and a few close friends who had reached the Free Zone sought refuge with us – among them François de Castellane, an officer of my battalion, and his wife. We lived like survivors from a shipwreck, in a gay and almost carefree intimacy, still blind enough to enjoy idle pleasantry. When the weather wasn't too awful, we'd go on long bicycle rides on the mountain roads. The traffic was practically non-existent; the only vehicles still running were a few charcoal-fuelled ones. We tried some skiing, but the only possible slope, no more than 200 yards long, was hardly worth the trouble. Nevertheless, we enjoyed this collective way of life. The slightest visitor was reason for a party, and throughout these months I was never bored or depressed. A message from Paris, a letter or telegram from America, were great events. In this isolated spot, the war seemed unreal; we felt far removed from Vichy. Only once, while I was telephoning, did I have the impression of the wires being tapped. I lost my temper, cursed that filthy Fifth Column and its anonymous spy – who, probably offended, must have hung up, because the line suddenly became clear again.

'Messieurs Edouard, Robert, Henri de Rothschild deprived of their French nationality!'

One morning, casually unfolding the newspaper (the news was censored and there was nothing of interest in it), I was stunned to see the name of my family in the headline of the front page. I couldn't believe my eyes; I trembled with rage. Those puppets who enjoyed the defeat as an excuse for punishing France, dared to condemn to 'national indignity' my aged parents, perfect victims, irreproachable patriots. The pretext was both hypocritical and cowardly: they had abandoned French soil. What a pitiful joke! They were too old to be of any useful service to the nation, and they refused to volunteer for cremation. After all, I too, along with a certain number of others, had 'abandoned French soil' – via Dunkirk! The denunciation of Henri de Rothschild was so scandalous as to be almost comical. A resident of Portugal for many years, he had indeed left France; coming from Belgium, where the war had caught him unawares, he was on his way home!

This decree, which deprived them of their citizenship, struck them off the list of the Légion d'honneur and confiscated their possessions, was also applied to a small, selected number of people who had left the country during actual warfare. It had been inspired by Alibert, the Minister of Justice in the first Pétain cabinet. Apart from his intention to strike a blow at the politicians who had embarked on the 'Massilia' in hopes of pursuing

the fight from outside France, Alibert, who was a pathological anti-semite, sought to harm my family in particular; I was told that he held it responsible for some election defeat. He'd even gone so far as to declare: 'Most of all, I'm using this decree to get at the Rothschilds.' (It's only fair to add that public opinion, informed of my combat record and of the fate of my cousins, finally imposed an added clause to the decree: sons who had served in the army could recuperate part of their father's possessions. Popularly referred to as 'the Rothschild appendix', it was, however, never applied.)

My indignation did not prevent me from thinking of a thousand questions posed by this new and unexpected situation. How was all of this going to take effect? Who would be in charge of the seizure and the sequestration? Would I be ousted from the bank, although I was the legitimate owner of only a small fraction of its capital? Weeks went by; my worries grew.

And then one day, another bombshell: the Statute of Jews. I read the text, in a state of nausea: we could no longer exercise a whole series of activities; we were excluded from all government employment. The extent of the 'incapacities', the things we could not do, was beyond belief; the pseudo-scientific justifications for the decree were sickening. The conciliatory declaration that the law affected neither the bodily persons nor the belongings of the Jews, had sinister implications.

The 'degradation' of my father had revolted me, but it hadn't humiliated me. The publication of the Jewish statute was unbearable. In our country, till then enlightened and liberal, we were now third-class citizens. With a little more effort, one could imagine hearing the German joke: 'A Jew in a public garden bit an Aryan dog.' We were excluded, insulted, designated for public vindictiveness, marked with the brand of infamy.

Why didn't I decide to leave the country at once? In fact, this was practically impossible. My honour and dignity wounded, I'm surprised how little time it took me not to accept this role of a pariah, but to refuse it. I was very soon convinced that, apart from certain limited anti-semitic circles which I did not frequent, the nation as a whole rejected this wicked plagiarism of the Nazis.

During the first few days I had the impression that everyone could see the brand of infamy on my forehead. But this feeling quickly disappeared since I experienced nothing to sustain it – not even those condescending expressions of sympathy that are usually offered to the vanquished. Very soon, as incredible as it may seem, I never even gave it a thought. And I was certainly not the only Jew in the Free Zone who dismissed from his mind a problem which nothing seemed to recall.

Everybody's principal preoccupations were how to procure food, how to

find a means of communicating with the Occupied Zone, how to obtain news of prisoners; everything that didn't affect one's daily life seemed of secondary importance. This withdrawal within themselves may have enabled people momentarily to forget the tragic situation of our country, but at the same time, nobody was particularly preoccupied any more by the fate of his neighbours. Today, one is struck by the fact that the French in the Free Zone hardly reacted at all to the horrible conditions imposed on the internees – Spanish Republicans, foreign Jews – in the Gurs camp. Vichy was terribly guilty, but one must admit that there were also many French Jews who closed their eyes and preferred to ignore the question. I still believe that the heart of the nation was not anti-semitic. The French were certainly as xenophobic as ever, and the recent immigration of Jewish refugees from Central Europe was not likely to soften their hearts. Some people in the Occupied Zone even took advantage of the situation to denounce personal enemies or competitors under the cover of 'official' good conscience.

Of course, anti-semitism was more pronounced in certain social classes than in others: I'm thinking in particular of the medical field. The French, like many other people, didn't care to know what might upset them too much. But many of them helped or hid Jews, which was not the case in Germany, even before the Gestapo had established its reign of terror.

In any case, this law remains one of the most shameful episodes in the history of our country.

One month later, Alix decided to return to France, despite the Statute of Jews, despite the decrees against my parents. I hesitated for a long time before giving her the green light, fearing that she might be walking into a trap. It was an act of courage on her part, for she thus accepted risks whose dire consequences she knew better than anyone.

I went to meet her near the Spanish frontier, and realized immediately that in her mind the French had become merely a cover for the Germans, therefore enemies. She didn't understand how I could continue to 'cling to my illusions', why I didn't realize how desperate the situation had become. Two incidents during our return trip happily proved the validity of my attitude.

First, we were stopped by a gendarme who asked for the car registration papers and my driver's licence. At that time, one could expect no good to come from such an encounter, and we watched anxiously as the officer inspected our papers. Then he said: 'It is a great honour to meet a member of such a famous and respected family . . .' Our nervousness was suddenly transformed into broad smiles.

A few hours later the same day, we stopped for lunch in a small

restaurant-hotel. Nobody paid any attention to us nor seemed aware of our arrival. All of the employees and guests were grouped in a circle in a corner of the room listening to the news on 'Radio London'. It was one of the rare moments in my life when I was quite content to have to wait for my meal!

In reality, the non-occupied zone was a miniature France, where there was little change in people's habits and relationships. Everyone shared the same problems, which, in a sense, added to the fraternity of the defeat. Collaboration was non-existent – as long as the Germans weren't there.

The Resistance movements were still clandestine and the population wasn't really aware of them until after the invasion of Russia in 1941, and even more after the American landing in North Africa in 1942, when the Germans extended the Occupation throughout the entire country.

I never met anyone who dared profess to being pro-German. The French were not, however, all of one mind. They were divided between those who could see no further than the defeat, and those who placed all their hopes in England and in a distant, however improbable victory.

On several occasions I was obliged to go to Vichy. It wasn't easy. I had to leave La Bourboule at seven in the morning and arrive only at three in the afternoon, after changing trains twice and enduring a long wait at Clermont-Ferrand.

Vichy had retained the old-fashioned air that is typical of spas out of season. Apart from the Hotel du Parc, the government headquarters and the adjoining restaurant, all the other buildings seemed covered by a depressing shroud. Few cars, few people in the streets. A provincial, dismal city. I never saw Pétain, neither close up nor from a distance; nor did I see any member of the government, any political personality I might have recognized. An uninformed traveller would certainly have noticed nothing out of the ordinary.

The inhabitants of the Free Zone seemed to be caught up in a frenzy for travel; they seemed to spend their lives in trains, continually going to Lyon, Marseille, the Côte d'Azur, before taking off for some other destination. The more difficult, uncomfortable and exhausting the trip, the more candidates there were for it. It was probably due to the need to overcome a feeling of isolation, especially on the part of Parisians who were accustomed to finding everything they needed right at hand.

I followed the trend: Vichy and Cannes, where I met many friends again, were my usual destinations. One of my cousins had rented a small villa in Cannes. He kept a cow in the garage in order to improve the very inadequate diet on the Côte. I don't know how he managed to feed the animal. At the Carlton Hotel, spies, probably German, listened in on conversations in the lobby and spoke English among themselves in an attempt to attract the naïve – but they fooled no one. Very soon, the

idleness of this resort life began to depress me. I was impatient to find some activity again, whatever it might be.

La Bourboule is important to me for another reason: it was there that I assumed responsibility for the bank and for the family. In the general confusion of defeat, the difficulties were enormous. Under the new law, my father was deprived of all he owned. The agency in charge of government property was appointed to prepare inventories of the family assets and to place them in sequestration until they could be sold for the benefit of the Secours National.

The purpose of my first visit to Vichy was to see one of the officials responsible and persuade him not to ruin all the families whose sole income was the pension that my father, uncles or the bank benevolently paid them. He finally agreed to maintain these commitments out of the confiscated assets.

Most of the real estate my family owned was in the Occupied Zone and was seized by the Germans, who refused the French authorities so much as the right of inspection. The rue Saint-Florentin was occupied by the Germans, as was my house on the Avenue Foch and the one belonging to my sister. Ferrières became a rest home for German troops, who so appreciated the comfort they found there that they tried to avoid attracting attention by exercising restraint in their depradations. All the *objets d'art* and the finest paintings of the family collection, in Paris as well as in the château, were shipped to Germany, undoubtedly on Goering's orders who wanted them for himself.

My parents unwittingly aided the Germans: worried by the increasingly certain prospect of war, they'd taken the precaution of having the best pieces of what had for long been called 'The Rothschild Collection', acquired mostly by my grandfather Alphonse, carefully packed in order to store them in a safe place during the bombardments.

The collection fortunately remained intact, and in 1945 the Allied missions composed of specialists from American and French museums finally discovered them in the depths of a German salt mine.

As for the horses deported to enrich the German stud farms, most of them were able to be traced thanks to their identity documents – thanks too, it should be added, to the denunciations by Germans who hoped to make a good impression on the Allies. Betrayal was not a monopoly of the French.

Our property located in the Free Zone was confiscated by the Vichy government. Thus, the villa my parents owned in Cannes was 'purchased' by the city.

But the principal assets were the bank and the financial holdings. Only

my own share remained unconfiscated. Luckily, the officials appointed by the government were not particularly zealous. In fact, they were mostly anti-German; many of them were even already Gaullists. In the end, the administration, recognizing its inability to manage such a personal kind of business, left me in charge of it all.

The government had ordered the liquidation of my family's assets and financial holdings. But buyers were scarce. My colleagues made it their job to find clients, most of whom agreed to give us options for a future re-purchase if ever 'the Rothschilds should see better days again'. Most of the stock holdings were thus transferred to friendly hands.

The man in charge of the bank on behalf of the government was named Morance. He began by studying the situation and then dictated a long report. The secretary who typed it managed to change the carbon paper for each page; thanks to this trick, I was able to read the text with the help of a mirror. It was written in an objective manner, neither favourable nor unfavourable; he obviously didn't want to get in trouble. Morance applied the law without being over-zealous; he was courteous, he didn't systematically seek to destroy us.

Gradually, my presence at La Bourboule seemed no longer necessary. I had complete confidence in my two closest associates, René Fillon and Roger Langlois; I knew I could entrust them with full responsibility. I dreamed of getting away, like many of my relatives – and above all, of rejoining my parents. Where and how I could resume fighting was a problem to be solved later. In the meantime, I was becoming vaguely aware of the risk I was running in staying. Since I had no contacts with the Resistance, I didn't see how I could be of help in that direction; and the idea of doing nothing had become unbearable. The English had always represented honour in my eyes. My heart was with them; all my hopes were engaged in their courageous battle. Joining the Free French in England therefore seemed to be the simplest, most natural solution for me.

It wasn't an easy decision to make. Leaving France meant abandoning my compatriots in their distress; and could it be merely an excuse for escaping from the rigours and dangers of wartime France and seeking comfort and security in America or elsewhere? To many people, quite beyond the influence of Vichy propaganda, leaving was equivalent to desertion. And so I felt guilty leaving behind friends who were condemned to stay. I wasn't far from considering myself a 'traitor to the homeland', all the more because I was convinced of the basic anti-Nazi feelings of my countrymen.

In the opinion of René Fillon, my former tutor, colleague and friend, one had to assert one's identity as a Frenchman. He told me repeatedly not to take the Statute of Jews seriously, not to believe that the Free Zone

could ever be occupied, nor that I could ever find myself in the slightest danger in France. To his mind, returning to combat was merely a pretty phrase, a cheap price for moral comfort, and he too wasn't far from thinking that to leave France was the equivalent of going over to the enemy camp.

My dilemma still astonishes me. How could I have, through scruples, become so ensnared in false problems? Perhaps because it was such a short time since I'd been entitled to make decisions, at the office as well as in my private life! I hadn't yet learned that, between two possible solutions, one can only choose the least bad; that one should never expect unanimous agreement; that after hearing everybody, one must listen only to oneself.

Alix and I hesitated for a while, but our doubts eventually simply faded away . . .

Having made our decision, we still had to implement it. In order to leave France, we needed papers as well as an American visa. This last formality was the only simple one, thanks to my parents' friendship with Mrs Roosevelt. With the French authorities, it was another kettle of fish! No man of age to bear arms was permitted to leave the country. But I soon learned that in the case of Jews, those undesirable citizens, it wasn't difficult to obtain a derogation. However, my name was too symbolic, and Admiral Darlan was afraid of being criticized by the Germans if he let me leave. (I learned this detail later from my friend Miguel Angel Carcano, Argentine Ambassador to France.)

At this point, we found an opportunity to go to Morocco, where my family had some business interests. In the spring of 1941, Alix and I embarked for Casablanca. We'd been told that the armistice commission there was headed by a German civilian, a diplomat by the name of Auer, whom Alix and her first husband had known before the war. She remembered that he'd expressed anti-Nazi ideas, that he was very outspoken, no doubt to show how well-informed he was. We agreed that if we happened to meet, we'd try to pump information from him. As luck would have it, we ran into him as we arrived at the hotel, and he invited us to have a drink at his apartment.

He was just back from Berlin, where he'd heard a persistent rumour: on 22 June, Germany was going to attack Russia. The very next morning, I passed on to the young American consul what must have been one of the most important pieces of information of the war. Nobody paid any attention to it; it may, in fact, have been too late. Someone told me that after the war Robert Murphy, who was then Resident Minister in North Africa, requested an investigation into the reason for this apparent negligence. In any case, on 22 June, Alix and I were amazed and overjoyed to hear the radio confirm this sensational news.

A little later, we spent a few days in Marrakesh. In the lobby of the Mamounia Hotel, a group of Italian officers was openly and noisily rejoicing in the lightning advance of their prestigious ally. Their exuberance pained us.

After a few weeks, we finally understood: not a chance of obtaining an authorization to leave Morocco or to escape from it; we were much more under surveillance there than in France. After putting my family's local business affairs in order, I sank into a state of restlessness, with nothing to do but read the newspapers. The occasional dinners with Ninette and Michel Debré, a childhood friend, were a pleasure and a comfort.

We decided to return to France when we learned that Pierre Pucheu had just been named Minister of the Interior. I'd met him several times before the war, when he was the arbiter of an industrial *entente* in which I had participated, and we'd established a friendly relationship. He was very close to the pioneer technocrats of the Worms banking group, and he'd seemed to me an energetic man, blunt-spoken, but intelligent and reasonable. Thanks to one of my associates, who was also a close friend of his, my application for an exit visa was delivered to him personally. Soon afterwards, I received my passport, accompanied by a verbal message from Pucheu: 'The Jews have done a lot of harm to my country, but Guy has always been a good citizen; if he can rebuild his life somewhere else, I'm happy to let him leave.' The complimentary reference to my modest person in no way excused his intolerable remark. In response, I merely advised him to cease his campaign against the Resistance and the Communists at once, if he hoped to live a long life. Less than two months later, one of his closest collaborators was found murdered in the countryside. In November 1942, after the American landing in North Africa, Pucheu applied to join the army in Africa, and Giraud unwisely agreed. What ensued is well known. Pucheu was court-martialled, condemned to death and shot.

In October 1941, Alix and I travelled through Spain on our way to Portugal, where we took the 'Clipper' for New York. Like everybody else, I signed a statement to the effect that I was aware of the legislation condemning to death any Frenchman who enlisted in a foreign army – one could read between the lines: de Gaulle. I considered it a mere formality.

It was my first trans-Atlantic flight. I was free, I was embarking on a new life, but I couldn't stop worrying. From afar, the little Free Zone seemed even smaller, even more vulnerable. I couldn't detach myself from it, and I couldn't stop thinking about those I'd left behind, my heart filled with affection and anxiety for them. But America meant security for Alix, the joy of being with my parents and sisters again. And the possibility of

action.

After my combat experience, I'd lived through another crucial period. From one day to the next, I had assumed complete responsibility in an unprecedented crisis. I'd had no father or mother to shield me. From then on, I really felt like an adult.

My life during those months also brought me face to face with another reality: under the surface of the social privileges from which I'd benefited since the day I was born, I could be nothing than just another Jew.

CHAPTER

8

A Frenchman in New York

To a young Frenchman accustomed to the leisurely rhythm of life in pre-war France, New York (which I'd visited briefly only once) offered a striking contrast. The vitality of the people, the ease with which everything could be accomplished, the profusion of merchandise of all kinds and, above all, the abundance of food, made my head spin!

I naturally expected to find the French and Americans unanimously enthusiastic in supporting the British and de Gaulle. To my surprise, I was submerged in a flood of contradictory opinions and judgements; I heard only expressions of doubt and reservation concerning the various political tendencies, and especially the Gaullist movement.

Some of the French in New York venerated Marshal Pétain and still believed in his integrity and good faith; many others were decidedly reticent towards General de Gaulle, whom they'd often heard described as a political adventurer, surrounded by misfits from the extreme right and left. The Free French thus appeared to be a typically French assemblage, in other words, undermined by political intrigue. Many perfectly patriotic people feared that joining the Gaullists would involve them in conflicts that didn't concern them, and entail a political choice rather than merely a military engagement. When General Giraud established a rival rallying point in North Africa, with the backing of the Americans, many of them joined him, hoping to limit their activity to participation in the war, with no political implications.

Moreover, there were all too many Gaullists in New York and Washington, bearing various official Gaullist titles, who planted seeds of doubt in people's minds: some by their intolerance and narrow-mindedness, others by their criticism of the way things were being run in de Gaulle's London headquarters, denouncing its intrigues, egoism and incompetence. Most of the Americans in government and political circles whom I consulted – and even the British – advised me that I could make a far greater contribution and play a far more useful role by joining them instead of the Free French.

The policy of the American government did nothing to clarify the situation. It maintained unbroken relations with the Vichy régime, to which it delegated Admiral Leahy, a most respectable and esteemed personage. The objective was obvious: to do everything possible to limit the effective participation of France in the German war effort, and above all to prevent her fleet from being utilized by the enemy. While it was only too evident, though hard to accept, the fact was that Roosevelt and the State Department were hostile to de Gaulle. The tension between the two men reached a climax when Admiral Muselier occupied the North Atlantic islands of Saint-Pierre-et-Miquelin in the name of the Free French: obviously, Admiral Leahy had promised Pétain that French territory in the American hemisphere would be respected, hoping to dissuade him from further collaboration with the Germans. As logical and realistic as this policy would seem to be, it was, however, becoming impossible to disregard the emotional element in the conflict between the followers and opponents of Gaullism.

Furthermore, Roosevelt and de Gaulle were completely opposite in temperament. The former, proud and conscious of his role as leader of a powerful nation, was quite incapable of understanding the General, as proud as himself, who remained intransigent, even without any forces to back him up. Each was right from his own point of view: Roosevelt, in temporizing with Vichy, even if by doing so he hurt anti-Nazi feelings; de Gaulle, in trying to rally around his name and person the potential of our country and its post-war possibilities. Roosevelt was playing for the immediate, de Gaulle for the future. Later on, when the Vichy government had been discredited, the hostility between Roosevelt and de Gaulle was no longer justifiable and became no more than a meaningless, deplorable prolongation of a personal feud.

To return to the French in New York at the end of 1941: the constitutional legality of the Vichy government was a disturbing factor. Vichy still governed the Free Zone as well as the vast territories of the French colonies; one could despise it, but one couldn't deny its existence. The French, so divided in their opinions, nevertheless share a legalistic approach towards their government: they respect the legitimacy of institutions and are united in their reverence for the idealized entity of France. The Vichy government held the attributes of legitimacy, however contestable, which no one among the French in the Allied camp could claim. The French in America hesitated; some of them, refusing to take sides, even joined the American, Canadian or British armed forces. Faced with this confusing dilemma, a respected member of the Cartier family took the inept initiative of suggesting that the volunteers let the American government choose a French 'leader', and then enlist with him. His

project was a failure, and he was thereafter referred to as 'Cartier général' (which means 'General Headquarters').

The mutual intolerance among the French was such that when I landed in New York, my comments to the press were maliciously distorted. I'd stated objectively that Pétain still enjoyed popular support, and that many people sincerely believed in his wily intention to play along with the enemy occupant in order to gain time. This was common knowledge. But the refugee mentality saw everything in black or white.

Caught up in this maelstrom of uncertainty, I tried to read with a critical eye the Gaullist press, in which excess vied with grandiloquence. Hoping to light my lantern, I welcomed the opportunity to visit Alexis Léger, whom I'd met before the war. It was not the poet Saint-John Perse whose advice I sought, but the former Secretary General of the Quai d'Orsay, whose judgement would be worth considering, even though it was well known in New York that he was not particularly in favour of de Gaulle's activities in London.

He greeted me most cordially, and I can still hear his astonishing voice with its occasional hint of a Creole accent: 'At any rate, this General at least has the advantage of not being a corrupt politician. There's a welcome freshness in his lack of political experience . . . ' His tone was somewhat flippant, as if none of this was really very important. The spice of the story is apparent only when one remembers General de Gaulle's subsequent violent opposition to Saint-John Perse's election to the Académie Française. It is undeniable that the General irrevocably condemned those who had failed to become totally engaged in his movement, especially at a time when their support would have been most valuable.

Confused by this dissonance of opinions, and until I could see things more clearly, I devoted myself to the family responsibilities that henceforth fell upon my shoulders.

It was impossible to take advantage of everything New York had to offer. Our thoughts were turned towards France; apart from a few new American acquaintances, we saw mostly the French friends we'd known before and met again. Although the French press had censored news of the terrible events of the *Vel d'Hiv*, the Paris sports arena where French Jews, mostly women and children, were rounded up in the middle of the night before being sent to concentration camps, the reports of this appalling atrocity finally filtered into the United States – alas, with considerable delay. I was horrified and feared the worst for those I'd left behind in France, as well as for all the Jews in Occupied Europe.

My parents led a quiet life in America, comfortable, but by no means luxurious. My father adjusted uncomplainingly to this life-style so far

removed from what he'd always known before. His only interest was in the war; he lived only for the day, which still seemed uncertain and remote, when he'd be able to return to France. He was so conscious of being exiled from his homeland, that I once heard him tell my mother, after he'd placed on a table some object which then fell off: 'You see, Germaine, in France it would not have fallen.' Notwithstanding his gratitude towards America, he always refused to accept his exile as permanent.

Alix soon became pregnant. We decided to move out of my parents' apartment and take one of our own on Fifth Avenue and 102nd Street, which was then a calm and tranquil neighbourhood (today it is less residential, on the edge of Harlem). During the summer, I rented a cottage in Syosset, Long Island. Alix was afraid of being again unable to carry her pregnancy to its full term, and so spent her time lying down, carefully avoiding all fatigue. In December, she gave birth to a baby boy. (And all of a sudden there were three generations of Rothschilds living in New York!) We named him David, which in Hebrew means 'the beloved' – it was almost a gesture of defiance.

Wishing to learn the particularities of American law, I arranged to meet my parents' lawyer, Abe Beinstock, a warmhearted, enthusiastic man of amazing youthfulness and exceptional vitality, who remained my friend until his recent death.

My father and my uncle Robert had rented a small three-roomed office on Fifth Avenue, where a young Dutchman, Peter Fleck, endeavoured to put their affairs in order by unravelling a complicated tangle of documents and forms to be filled in. I helped him as best I could, thanks to the information I was able to provide. Little did I suspect that the modest activities of this micro-organism of a business would develop considerably after the war, and eventually become the basis of the American financial establishment to which I have devoted my time since our French bank was nationalized.

At the end of the war, Peter Fleck set up an American financial company for us with two Dutch partners, who later withdrew. It prospered, and we were able to sell it twenty-five years later on good terms. In the meantime, in 1967, at my instigation, this company created an investment bank. Our English cousins willingly agreed to join us in the venture, and thus New Court Securities came into being – New Court being the name of the building which houses the Rothschild Bank in London. Its growth was slow but remarkably stable and vigorous until 1981, when there was a conflict with the president, who left us in the middle of that year. It was then decided to strengthen the Rothschild position, and my cousin Evelyn, Chairman of the Board of N. M. Rothschild & Sons of London, and myself, became co-Chairmen. The

name was changed to Rothschild, Inc. – and it is this company that is now providing the French branch of my family with a chance to regain its place in the world of international finance.

But New York life had more to offer than worry and self-questioning. Americans are extremely sociable, so we formed new friendships and consolidated old ones. I met old friends of my own age again, such as Geoffroy de Waldner and Raoul Heilbronner, as well as older ones I'd known before the war.

For example, there was Henri Bernstein, the famous playwright, a really flamboyant personality. With his massive body surmounted by a large head with a prominent nose, his droll manner of speaking was inimitable – except by Hervé Alphand, who had an extraordinary gift for mimicry. Hervé was a keen supporter of de Gaulle, who was to appoint him Ambassador to the United States; endowed with subtle wit, he could at times be very sensitive.

Then there was Philippe Barrès; tall, dark, kindly and reserved, his handsome face was often shadowed by an indescribable air of gloom. He seemed to be as much a prey to doubt and depression as his father – the writer Maurice Barrès, 'the bard' of nationalism – radiated confidence and strength. But he had made his choice and he defended his ideas energetically, publishing a little newspaper in New York called *Pour La Victoire*.

I also saw a lot of Henri and Helle Bonnet. A man of character, solid and serious, he became the first Ambassador to Washington from liberated France, after the fall of the Vichy government. She was Greek-born, raven-haired, full of vitality, voluble and quick-witted. She had the courage and imagination to open a hat shop in New York, which soon was wildly successful and thanks to which the Bonnets were able to struggle through those difficult years. (After the war, she made a present of the business to the young girls who had worked with her.)

I also met Paul and Suzanne Weill, both of them lawyers, both ardent patriots; refusing to be discouraged by the difficulties of their daily life, they set an example of dignity, contagious good humour and warm friendship.

But the man who probably made the deepest impression on me was Isaiah Berlin. While he was a British citizen, the most immediately striking thing about him was his unconventional appearance: his peculiar air of seeming to float in his clothing, a strange face that seemed almost a caricature of his two dominating characteristics: subtle intellect and Russian-Jewish ancestry. A professor of philosophy and history at Oxford, Isaiah was then serving as one of the most important members on the staff of the British Embassy in Washington. He knew all the secrets of

American politics, and proved to be of inestimable aid to Anglo-American relations. Brilliant, original, witty and bold, truly erudite, he was unanimously admired as much for what he was as for what he did, and he was universally recognized as an exceptional, fascinating human being. He loved music and the Russian language, and enjoyed nothing more than talking about music in Russian; the problem was to find a polyglot music-lover! My admiration and friendship for Isaiah have remained as great as ever, and Marie-Hélène, who met him only twenty-five years later, was immediately subjugated by his warmth and intelligence. Isaiah married one of my cousins, but we do not see him as often as we'd like; he doesn't care to leave Oxford.

Finally, of course, we became joyously reunited with various members of the Rothschild family: my uncle Robert and his wife Nelly, their daughters Diane and Cécile, and my older cousins, Louis, Eugène and his wife Kitty.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, America entered the war; but I should add the reminder that as long as a Free Zone existed in France, she maintained her relations with Vichy.

A sad incident is indicative of the low esteem in which the French were held at that time: the magnificent ocean liner *Normandie* had been bought by the United States; it was docked in the Port of New York when fire broke out on board. It so happened that the French engineer who had designed the ship and knew it better than anybody in the world, was in New York just then, and offered his help in fighting the fire. But he was French, therefore suspect; his offer was refused, and the *Normandie* was totally destroyed.

While the United States was mobilizing its resources of manpower and *matériel* with astonishing efficiency, I never ceased thinking about my return to combat, and gradually freed myself from the contradictory pressures I'd been subjected to.

To tell the truth, with no new, decisive event occurring to clarify my ideas, I simply gave in to the attraction that the Gaullist movement had always held for me. In a way, it was the bold solution, whereas it might have seemed more prudent to join Giraud. When I enlisted, I was warned that it would take some time for my papers to be processed in London; after which, my journey to Europe would depend on the British, who had no reason for giving priority to a few French volunteers.

At the end of 1942 the Americans landed in North Africa. Everyone expected to see the Vichy laws immediately repealed in these territories. My father was particularly concerned by the uncertain fate of the Algerian Jews: Vichy had revoked the Crémieux decree which since 1870 had made them citizens of France. The local authorities, faithful to Vichy, did

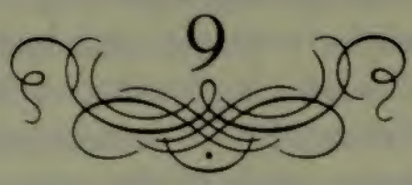
nothing, and the Americans were reluctant to force their hand. My father, old, already weak and failing, deprived of position and influence but inspired by an almost prophetic power, still had the courage to protest. After waiting in vain for weeks, he finally lost his patience and wrote a long letter to Sumner Welles, the Undersecretary of State, in which he denounced the Americans' neglect of their responsibility in such a vital matter. He'd obviously touched a sensitive point, because Welles's reply was in the form of an open letter in which he stated that my father's accusations were false – the word 'lie' occurred several times. Shortly afterwards, the Algerian Jews regained their French citizenship. It was considered a victory for the Gaullists, since most of the Jewish community in North Africa had actively aided the Allied landings. But in the eyes of the Americans, at least, my father was given the credit. His act had been the fulfilment of a moral obligation rather than a political gesture. He had simply behaved in the purest family tradition: considering it a sacred duty to defend the Jewish people, whenever, wherever. I promised myself never to forget his example.

When diplomatic relations between the United States and France were broken, what had formerly been the 'French Consulate' was automatically transformed into the 'Free French Consulate'. My son David was inscribed in the consular Birth Registry as number one, while Gérard, the son of my friend Geoffroy de Waldner (who had chosen to join Giraud) was registered as number two.

One of the first things I did after enlisting was to order an officer's uniform from the only French tailor in New York.

I'd been told to await further instructions. Never did I imagine that I'd have to wait so long . . .

CHAPTER



The Cruel Sea

The French administration has always excelled in slowness. The war did not improve things, nor did the example of American efficiency. With all of my enlistment papers duly signed, I had to wait several months before anybody got round to informing me of the date, time, place and means of my joining the Free French.

At last the day arrived when I was told to prepare for immediate embarkation. I threw a pair of pyjamas and some toilet articles into my officer's valise, not forgetting my enlistment papers and a few personal belongings. But that was all; we'd been advised to take a minimum of baggage with us.

Alix drove me to the port where, in my brand-new uniform, I boarded the *Pacific Grove*, a small cargo ship of about 7,000 tons, laden (if not overladen) with meat and tanks – I almost wrote 'butter and guns'! The crew nonchalantly informed us that if we were torpedoed, the boat would immediately split in two and sink within 90 seconds. I'll never forget that figure after hearing it repeated so often, always with the same emphatic precision: 90 seconds!

There were eighteen passengers, among them two Frenchmen about my age who were joining de Gaulle; one of them, Maurice Meunier, a jovial, kind-hearted fellow, was a 'nose': an expert in distinguishing and blending scents for the perfume industry. There was also a very nice English couple, he was a former RAF officer who had been wounded during the French campaign; a young American woman, Maxine Miller, a not-so-secret member of the OSS, pretty, blonde and rather shy, with whom I still keep in touch through time and space; another Englishman, who was a bear-leader or a dog-trainer, I forget . . .

At the beginning of the voyage, the Captain explained that we were going to follow the coastline north to Canada as far as the latitude of Halifax, where we'd join a convoy.

Crossing the Atlantic in those days was a real adventure. German submarines controlled the seas. Actually, it was the beginning of the end

for them, because the combination of radar and the air supremacy the Americans had acquired was already starting to reverse the roles: the hunters would soon become the prey, as was so admirably depicted in the 1982 German film, *The Boat*.

It was near the end of March, still winter in New York, and the cold weather we'd had there became increasingly bitter as we sailed north. By the time we were off the coast of Halifax, the ship was shrouded in frost. It was a spectacular sight, but we didn't have time to admire it; the sheet of ice that covered the deck made the evacuation drills which the crew made us rehearse too perilous.

Each passenger was assigned to one of the four lifeboats, large enough for twenty people: two on the port side, two more on the starboard. They were made fast to the ship above the water-line and thus were easily lowered into the sea. The deck was crowded with life rafts secured by sailor's knots that could be released with a simple pull. These were constructed of spaced wooden planks, underneath which barrel-like floats were joined together by a solid wooden floor. We learned how to arrange our positions, if need be, by sitting on the upper slats with our legs either hanging over the side (there was no railing), or stuck through the slats, resting on the floor-board. We practised the drills for 'Alert' and 'Abandon Ship' over and over again until each of us knew his role by heart, and we felt relatively self-confident. But I still couldn't get the thought of those 90 seconds out of my mind!

The convoy was formed off Halifax. It was not at all as I'd imagined. Unlike a military convoy, in which the vehicles follow one another in Indian file, the ships lined up abreast in order to offer a minimum target, since the danger in naval warfare always comes from a lateral direction. Altogether there were sixty ships deployed in three long lines, chance allotting us the number one position of 'starboard leader' at the far right of the first line. While the last line was shorter than the others, ours was so long that the port leader, on the extreme left, was out of sight over the horizon. The second line seemed quite close to us, but actually followed at a distance of over 300 yards. I learned incidentally that the boat immediately behind us, an English vessel, was stuffed with munitions and explosives, a veritable arsenal! and that our exposed flank-guard position was the most dangerous of all. The sailors seemed to enjoy reminding us repeatedly that we'd drawn the unlucky number, but perhaps they were merely trying to reassure themselves.

Life on board soon fell into a routine. The icy deck was unsuitable for strolling, and the only place to stay in during the daytime was the little officers' saloon on the starboard side of the deck. Its port-holes were carefully blacked out with wooden panels, hermetically sealed so that no

light could filter through. After nightfall, we passed the time as best we could, chatting, playing cards or various parlour games.

After a few days the frost abated, and we were sailing in what was for the month of March good Atlantic weather. Our protection consisted of three or four British corvettes and a Free French destroyer; and in the air, long-range Catalinas based in Canada and Newfoundland on one side, in Ireland and England on the other, which searched the seas and detected enemy submarines. However, there remained a gap in the middle that took 48 hours to cross and was not covered by air observation from either side.

As we approached this gap, the weather cleared up, the sea subsided into a long, flat swell, and the moon rose in a clear sky, giving excellent night visibility. Our escort vessels acted like sheepdogs, moving fast and far around us, and we were soon aware of lurking submarines in the danger zone because our escorts were dropping depth charges which hammered our hull however far away they were.

On the morning of what was expected to be the most hazardous 24 hours, we decided to spend the following night in the saloon, fully dressed and equipped so as to be ready for any emergency, with the hope of going to bed the next day. Around 6 p.m. a message came from the Captain forbidding any more drinks. Dinner was uneventful, but from then on we were told to carry our life-jackets with us constantly, even to the toilet. An extra-long night was facing us and we felt pretty helpless in the dimly-lit room, waiting and hoping, with nothing to do.

Around 10.30 p.m. the nervous strain was beginning to tell, so we decided to play a game. Each player had to draw a crossword grid five-by-five, everyone in turn named a letter, and when all twenty-five letters had been placed as cleverly as possible, the winner was the person who had made up the most words. After a few of these games, I claimed a winning score. But my neighbour, looking over my shoulder, objected, saying that I'd counted SUB as a word although, no matter how often it appears in American newspapers, it is only an abbreviation. A discussion ensued, with me repeating, 'SUB exists', my neighbour insisting, 'SUB does not exist' . . . until finally one of our companions said, 'Well, let's make this the last one.' As he pronounced those words, the torpedo struck.

The lights went out and the ship quivered in a manner that left no doubt. I realized at once, 'This is it, we've had it.' But the noise of the explosion was muffled, since it took place well below and under water. Within a second the 'Abandon Ship' signal was sounded. We picked up our things and walked out of the saloon onto the deck.

As I set foot on it, one of the fuel tanks caught fire, with flames rising above the funnel ten yards high at least. It was quite a weird spectacle,

Edouard and Philippe.

White Label, surprise winner of the Grand Prix de Paris.

The manor at Meautry and some of its inhabitants.

One is never bored in the company of Georges Pompidou.

The shoot at Ferrières.

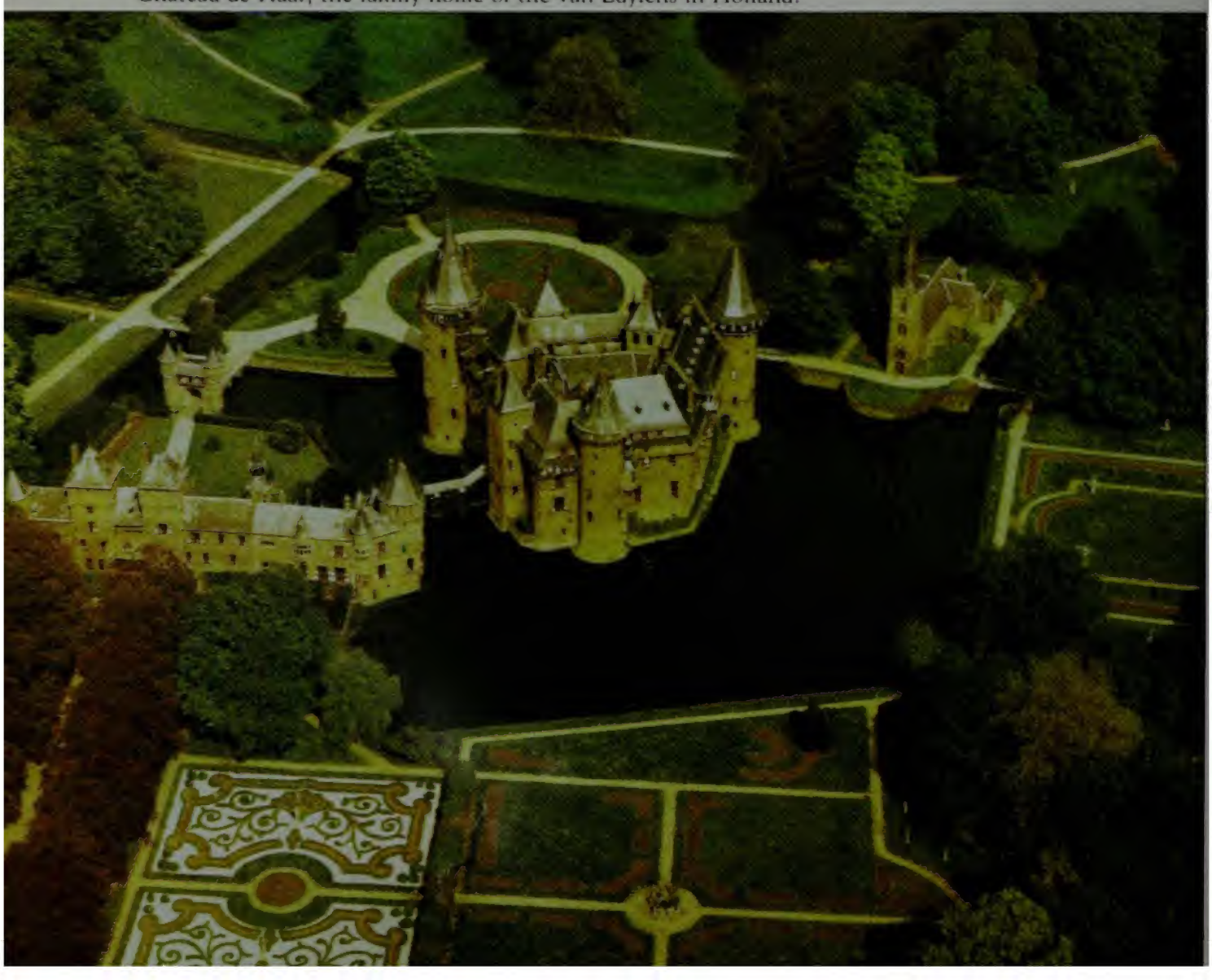
At the shoot: Etienne de Monpézat.

At the shoot: Marie-Hélène and Eric de Rothschild.

Queen Margrethe of Denmark and Marie-Hélène share an umbrella.

"150 seconds make up for 87 years!" In 1977, Crystal Palace won the French Derby; we rejoice with master trainer François Mathet.

Château de Haar, the family home of the van Zuylens in Holland.



In spite of the smiles, it's the saddest photo of 1981, painful as it was in more ways than one: Pinka, eighteen years old, has only a few hours to live; Vieux Manoir, thirty-four years old, a few weeks . . .

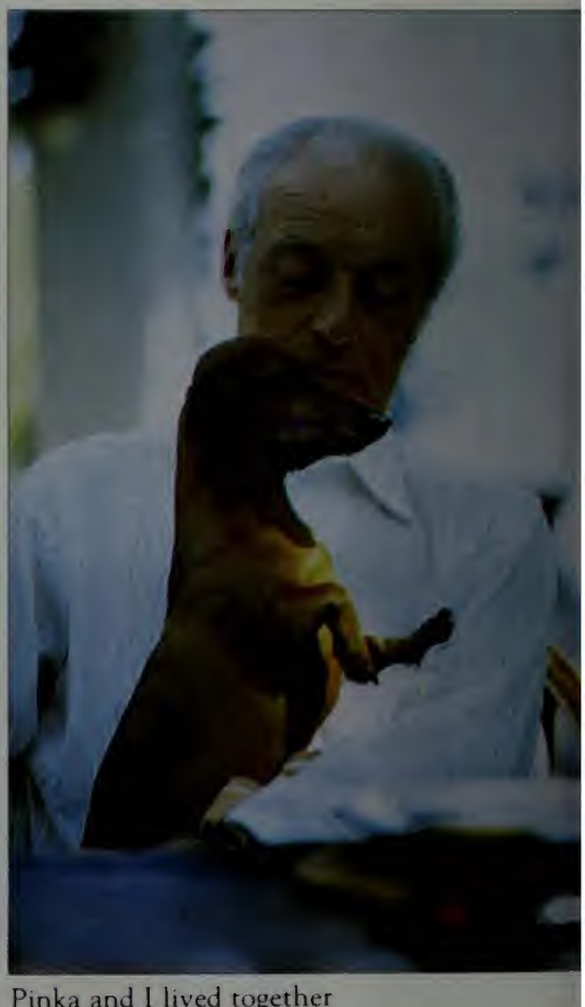
David's engagement at Ferrières.

Hôtel Lambert: a dinner in the Gallery of Hercules.

The young
Edouard.

A charming couple: Philippe
and Marie-Hélène.

Grandfather for the first time,
with Lavinia.

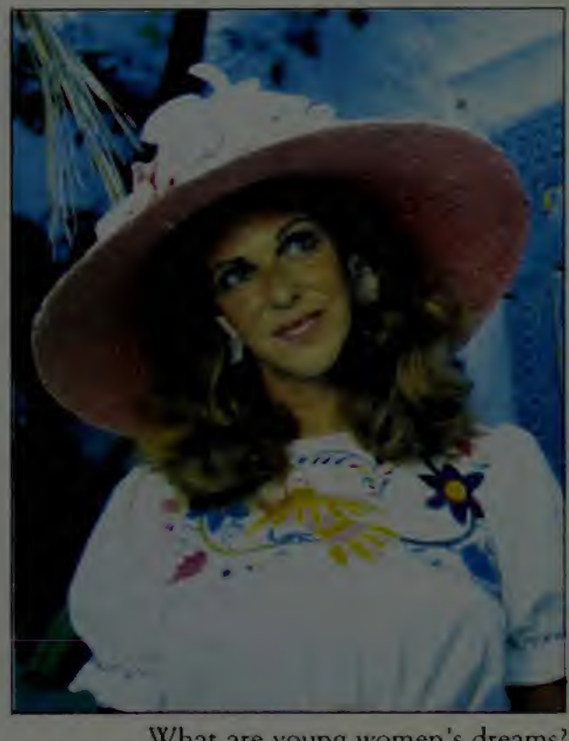


Pinka and I lived together
for eighteen years.

Me again! Profile this time . . .

"La vie en rose" . . .

Alexis de Redé.



What are young women's dreams?

e dear old bank.

"The Room" at the rue Laffitte.

because all the ships close to us were firing machine-gun bursts of tracer bullets, like fingers of light pointing where they thought the enemy was lurking. Almost at once I saw a large round flash behind us, and later learned it was the munitions-laden ship that followed us which had also been hit. It sank in a matter of minutes, with no loss of life and without exploding – otherwise nothing would have remained of the *Pacific Grove* and nobody to describe the scene; we'd all have been blown to heaven.

There was no panic on board. I noted that the fateful 90 seconds had long since passed, which was of some slight reassurance. I was nevertheless overwrought, my mouth dry, conscious of the fact that death was close at hand.

Our difficulties were only beginning, because the blast had smashed our two starboard lifeboats. The other two were lowered immediately, someone shouting the time-worn phrase: 'Women and children first!' A number of male passengers joining the ladies jumped in together with members of the crew. I didn't want to push, jostle, exercise my rights . . . and I watched the lifeboat, my lifeboat, move off without me. I can't even swear that it was as full as it might have been . . . It wasn't heroics, I was simply a victim of my 'good manners'.

At this point I discovered to my horror that all the rafts which littered the deck had vanished and none could be seen anywhere at sea. The crew, fearing that the ship would sink instantly – those famous 90 seconds! – had thrown them all into the water, making the fatal mistake of forgetting that a ship does not pull up quickly; by now they were half a mile behind us. An attempt was made to move the big motor launch, but its supporting mast had been warped by the explosion and it wouldn't budge. By then a second fuel tank had caught fire, and the ship was burning furiously from inside. The situation was desperate. I kept going from one side of the deck to the other, hoping to spot some floatable object I could hang onto and thus get away without drowning. I heard a loud voice saying, as if in a trance: 'If my poor mother could see me now!' Death was staring us in the face: we could only burn or drown, and I remember that a small deep part of my ego was watching me critically to see if I would behave properly till the end.

At that point the first miracle occurred: someone discovered two or three rafts on the top bridge. They were quickly brought alongside, and one by one we descended a rope ladder, up to our chins in sea water, and onto the raft. As I'd been about to step onto the ladder, a sailor approached at the same time. In an instantaneous reflex (always that side of me watching the other to see if I'd know how to 'die with dignity'), I gave myself a perfectly idiotic speech – however, not devoid of rhyme nor reason, which is why I repeat it now:

'You may think you are a person of importance; moreover, you're a

passenger and normally have priority over this sailor. But . . . ' All this in my over-excited brain was to end in the conclusion you can guess: I yielded my place to the sailor, with no assurance that there'd be room for everybody. A few moments later I was reassured on that point. But the duality, the last wish not to muff my exit – I had the same reaction on the three occasions when I was face to face with death – my upbringing rose to the surface. As somebody once said about culture, perhaps good manners are what is left when one has forgotten everything else.

Apart from having at last left the ship, our position had in fact not improved, because we were against this big hull which was rolling dangerously on top of us, and as everyone knows, when a ship sinks it drags down in its wake all the floating objects around it. We had no oars, and despite all our efforts we didn't move. Desperation crept in once more.

At that moment there came from inside the ship an agonizing scream. It was not repeated, but to this day my blood curdles at the thought. The explosion of the torpedo had warped all the floors so that open doors could not be closed and closed ones could not be opened. I hate to think how this man had been trapped and what he endured.

Our hopes of survival were further dashed by the fact that we were on the side of the wind which seemed to preclude moving away. But then a second miracle occurred: the crest of a wave filtered its way between us and the ship, and after a while a second one; after one more, we realized that we were drifting up-wind. If my brain had been functioning normally, I would have understood that the wind was pushing the ship away from us, and not the contrary. As we began to believe that we might not be drowned after all, I became conscious of the fact that my clothes and body were covered by the fuel into which I'd dipped before hoisting myself onto the raft; the smell filled me with nausea and made me violently sick. Realizing that if this got out of control it would be the end of me, I mobilized all my willpower and successfully put a stop to the spasms.

But yet another danger threatened us: would the huge oil patch that surrounded us catch on fire when the burning ship went down? It was only when we were several tens of yards away that we began to feel reassured. Sitting in water up to our waist, we rose with the swell, and each wave swept a heavy flood of icy water over our shoulders. When we were lifted on a crest for a fleeting moment, I could see the entire ocean littered with flashing torches on the other lifeboats and rafts; then we'd plunge down in the dark hollow again. The cold was fierce. I held onto the raft alternately with one hand, then the other; the one in the water was numb, and the other arm shivered violently, uncontrollably. One of the officers of the *Pacific Grove* was with us, but when asked about our chances of being picked up, he answered most unconvincingly. There was nothing left to do

but suffer bravely until daybreak, about eight hours after we'd abandoned ship.

When, after an eternity, dawn finally arrived, a large vessel loomed in sight half a mile away and we all shouted: 'Rescue ship!' It rolled and pitched but never moved towards us, and we soon realized that it could be of no help as it was obviously abandoned, though still afloat.

A moment later another ship was sighted. This time we waited before rejoicing. But it was indeed a 'real live' corvette which was proceeding to approach each group of survivors with great caution, throwing out a rope (which was missed each time), coming back and repeating the manœuvre until the rope was caught, waiting until the survivors had all climbed on board, before moving on to the next. It was hours before our turn came – we happened to be the last – and in the meantime the cold became increasingly unbearable. The wind was freshening and the swell was getting heavier. It must have been about twelve hours after boarding the raft that my turn came.

Painfully, I managed to stand up. The corvette loomed above me. I weighed a ton, my trenchcoat was nothing but a canteen filled with sea water, my limbs were paralysed, my willpower annihilated.

The sea was really swelling heavily now, and that's what saved me. A powerful wave lifted me to the level of the rail. Hands and arms toppled me onto the deck. Unable to speak, to move, to walk, completely inert, I let myself be taken in hand.

I recognized my two French friends; their smiles could not entirely conceal their concern. Carried off like a bag of wet laundry to the crew's sleeping quarters, I was undressed, rolled in a blanket and put to bed. It was soft, it was comfortable, it was warm. And yet I continued to shiver for another hour, unable to regain my normal body temperature.

Naked, shivering, exhausted, I suddenly heard the alarm signal. I'd just been rescued, and already I had to start all over again? For the first time in my life, I think, I gave up. This was too much! I knew that a corvette could sink within a few seconds (it is constructed of a single piece, with no compartments), but I lay there, immobile and helpless, despite the siren bellowing in my ears its familiar message: 'General quarters, combat stations!' Alone, abandoned, I saw nothing, understood nothing – except that we were moving full speed ahead. But none of it even interested me anymore; I'd entrusted my fate to Providence.

Only later did I learn the whole story: the corvette had just taken aboard the Captain of the third torpedoed ship, a Dutch vessel, when he realized with horror that he'd forgotten to destroy the secret convoy code, which could reveal inter-convoy messages, rescue routes . . . No question of letting it fall into enemy hands.

The British Captain didn't hesitate a second: he put a motor launch to sea with his aide and the Dutch Captain. They recovered the code and destroyed it. But as they were about to re-board the corvette, the German submarine, which had undoubtedly been prowling all night long, launched a torpedo, missing its target by only a few yards. The English Captain fired a salvo in the direction of the enemy and took flight, abandoning the motor launch. After ten miles or so, believing that he'd shaken off the submarine, he turned back and recommenced the complicated manœuvre of rescuing the passengers in the motor launch.

And during all this time, alone in my cabin, unaware of these events, I was thawing out and refusing to think of anything else.

After that, it was all over. The rest of the voyage was merely a story of discomfort. With 180 survivors on board, there wasn't enough room to lie down outstretched, there was no water for washing, the corvette rolled and pitched heavily – but we were fed, and slowly recovered. The convoy had lost the three ships on the starboard side, but only ours had suffered casualties: thirteen in all, most of them killed in the engine room which the torpedo had blasted out of existence.

We landed at Gourock in Scotland and I disembarked in my uniform, looking like a castaway, reeking of fuel oil, open-collared (since I'd lost my necktie, haversack and pyjamas), but still carrying next to my heart my papers and two or three cherished photographs. Yellowed by adventure, sea water and oil, they were for many years on the corner of my desk, until the day some thoughtless burglar stole them, along with my Free French officer's card.

A long scratch down my leg, probably infected by fuel oil, had developed into a greenish blister. Before going to our appointed hotel, I had time to buy a toothbrush, razor, nailbrush and soap – without being asked for ration tickets. I had a delightfully hot bath, and with the aid of the nailbrush and soap, I opened the blister and tried to clean the wound without wincing too much. The next day it was practically healed, and I tranquilly took the train to London.

That same evening, I invited my friend Jacques Bingen to dinner in a restaurant, and was amused to see the other customers ostensibly avoid our table, pinching their noses with expressions of disgust. My uniform still reeked of my adventure.

From that shipwreck a thousand miles off the coast of Ireland, I've retained a certain number of memories: some of them valuable lessons, others cruel nightmares.

'Oh, seas, what sorrowful stories you could tell!' lamented Victor Hugo.

Among the many accounts of shipwrecks that I've read since then, it is *The Cruel Sea* by Nicolas Monsarrat that evokes my own experience with the greatest realism and accuracy – even though he describes terrible scenes I didn't have to witness, such as those sailors floating in a circle, linked together by their lifebelts, dead while waiting to be rescued.

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The most fitting ending to such a watery sea story could only be . . . a bottle of wine! My cousin Jimmy selected from his wine cellar a Lafite worthy of the adventure. He asked me to guess the vintage.

I thought I recognized one of my favourites, a wine I'd often appreciated at my father's house.

'1895!' I announced, supremely confident.

My cousin gave me a surprised look.

'You're right!' he said, 'that's a good omen. From now on the war will take a turn for the better . . . '

CHAPTER

10

Free French

In London I took a room at the Dorchester Hotel. The very first night I was awakened with a start by an alert. Not knowing exactly what I ought to do in the circumstances, I asked the telephone operator, who replied laconically, 'Do as you like!' So I went back to bed. Then, with the lights turned off, I got up to open a window: a lone aeroplane, caught in the beams of the anti-aircraft searchlights, was trying to escape.

I was back in the war. The city bore evident traces of it. Soldiers everywhere, streets with bombed-out buildings like mouths with missing teeth; sandbags piled in vulnerable spots. Nevertheless, one had the strange impression of an orderly city: there was no rubble lying about; people came and went about their business calmly, frequented pubs and restaurants as usual (ration tickets existed only for clothing).

At night the helmeted civil defence patrols made their rounds; their job was to climb onto the roofs at the first air raid signal, prepared to deal immediately with incendiary bombs.

A soldier once again, I reported for duty with my written orders (stained with oil, they had at least survived the shipwreck), and was duly enlisted. After being issued equipment and clothing – I kept my dragoon's insignia: silver stripes on a black background, black forage cap with white in the crease – I was sent to Camberley, a training camp one hour by train from London.

When I signed my enlistment papers in the United States, I'd wondered what my activity would be: I realized that the Gaullist government might be a bit embarrassed by my presence. Vichy propaganda repeated incessantly that the Free French were nothing but 'a pack of Jews' accompanied by a few 'French traitors'; and while nobody gave much credit to these affirmations, it still seemed clear to me that a Jew bearing a name like mine would immediately be dispatched – not to say relegated – into the anonymous ranks of troops. Besides, all I had to my credit was some brief experience in warfare. So I expected no promotion of any kind, and was quite prepared to follow the natural course of my engagement.

Those who, like us, arrived from America where the war was merely a distant conflict, suddenly had a profound feeling of satisfaction at taking part in this battle that engulfed the entire world. Moreover, when I set foot again on my 'native continent', it was almost like coming home. The Americans participated in the war; the British lived it. Their country was the constant target of the Germans and suffered terrible destruction from continual bombardment. During the dark days of 1940 and 1941, the British had stood stoically firm. In the Far East, in North Africa, even in Europe, they were now more than ever in the front line. And suddenly I was there, where everything was happening.

I soon had the impression that the camp at Camberley was being used to park the men whom nobody quite knew what to do with. The younger volunteers and unattached officers had probably all been posted to French units which had already been formed. At any rate, nobody proposed that I join them, and with my sense of discipline, I assumed my allotted duties conscientiously. As the only officer with recent combat experience, I was appointed military instructor, and shortly afterwards aide to the camp commandant.

He was a professional soldier, an elderly World War I Major, kind, though addicted to liquor, and was assisted by two nice fellows who spent all their time trying to repair the tanks and armoured cars that had been salvaged from Narvik, and who seemed to be one war behind the rest of us. The more excitable of the two, perpetually covered with grease and oil, forever twisting a rubber finger that replaced the one he must have lost in some trench, pronounced delirious discourses about the day when his engines, finally in working condition again, would rout the Germans.

Occasional pleasant walks in the woods, rare encounters with French officers passing through – one of whom, I remember, was Bourgès-Manoury, with whom I played chess – I was very bored and soon sought some more useful occupation.

Two weeks after my arrival in London, I was notified of an important event: like every officer, I was going to be presented to General de Gaulle. Since I hadn't the slightest personal interest in politics, he was to me not a statesman, even less as historical personage; he was my Commander-in-Chief.

Still, it was a great occasion. Wearing my new uniform, I went to his headquarters in Carlton Gardens and, on the dot of the appointed hour, was duly ushered into his presence. The General was alone, standing in the middle of his spacious office. Why do I remember feeling intimidated, something practically unknown to me? Why was I overawed by that already legendary face?

I stood at attention, gave my name and rank in the proper manner and waited.

The General's face was expressionless: no curiosity, no sign of interest, no sign whatsoever. The silence continued for several long, oppressive, embarrassing seconds. Then he asked me what were my intentions, what I hoped to do.

The question, while not out of the ordinary, still caught me by surprise and I didn't know what to answer. After another silence, I said that I was there to serve my country and to carry out the orders I received.

Another silence. My reply seemed unexpected to him. Then he shook my hand in a gesture of dismissal. And I never saw him again until the middle of the 1950s, when our paths crossed quite by chance.

I left, disappointed. My high hopes were replaced by a feeling of frustration. After so much speculation about de Gaulle, so many impassioned discussions about the true significance of his 'call', his 'combat', so many doubts as to the true character of the Free French Forces, this interview – or rather, non-interview – had the effect on me of a cold shower.

Was it due to his reserve, his innate lack of warmth, his shyness, his dignity? I learned later that he'd just been told of the death in a plane crash of a prestigious officer who had recently joined him and was a personal friend. I also learned that silence was his means of testing the political ambitions of the new arrivals.

After three months at Camberley, I was transferred to London. Like the other officers, I rented a furnished room (at Lancaster Gate, from a charming elderly lady), and went 'to the office' every morning.

Daily life included just the proper dose of discomfort and difficulty. For example, the gas heater in my room functioned only when a shilling was slipped into a slot, and then for no more than half an hour. Since the room was quite large, I stayed literally glued to the heater, with scorching knees and frozen face. No bathtub either, just a washbasin for a minimum of hygiene.

Our food was pretty dull – especially the bread made from potato flour; and the evenings were rather lugubrious, apart from an occasional dinner with friends. There was no public lighting of any kind; the city was virtually plunged in darkness; only the taxis were permitted a tiny light, invisible beyond a short distance. And on 'smog' days, I had to find my way back by groping along the walls . . .

Nevertheless, this orderly, austere little existence was quite tolerable. The worst was yet to come: the bombings.

In February 1944, there was a series of air raids, a sort of mini-blitz.

Every night, as soon as the alert was sounded, we descended into the cellar. For someone like myself, who had not experienced the dreadful bombardments of 1940, it was impressive. It's difficult to imagine the infernal din of an air raid: bomb explosions mingled with intense anti-aircraft fire.

The damage was serious. Several times we shared our cellar with neighbours and friends whose flats had been demolished or evacuated because of delayed-action bombs. I remember in particular the bombardment that struck the residence of the French Institute, donated by my great-uncle Edmond de Rothschild. An officer named Fatou, who was living in it, hadn't turned up at the office that morning and I was sent to seek news of him. I had to talk my way through a police cordon before I realized that nothing was left of the building: it had been completely flattened, like a squashed matchbox. The 'incident officer' suggested that I try to identify the 'remains or scraps of uniforms' of Frenchmen I'd never seen – but I declined his gruesome invitation. Miraculously, a young girl was found uninjured; her parents on the other side of the same room had vanished, blown to bits. Another day, it was an elderly officer who appeared at my door, his stomach riddled with glass fragments.

One morning, I was worried by the absence of my office-mate, Pierre Messmer,* and alerted a police officer I knew – who was unable to help me. It wasn't until noon that Messmer arrived, his air of innocence turning to anger when he learned of the alarm I'd sounded. He had good reason to be discreet about his activities that night . . .

These air raids were nothing compared to those that followed the Normandy landings. One evening I was dining with friends in a light-hearted mood, when we were intrigued by a strange new sound of explosions, much louder than usual. We immediately thought of the 'flying bombs', which had been rumoured for some time and were nicknamed 'doodlebugs'. An absurd fantasy made us imagine them in the shape of birds, flapping their wings before flying through the windows! They were, in fact, the V1.

All night long the alerts succeeded one another at an incredible rhythm, every half hour if not more. The downpour continued during the next few days. One could see these deadly devices approach in groups, rather like miniature aeroplanes, very fast, their motors backfiring like giant motorcycles. Their appearance wasn't so impressive, but when the noise stopped, one's heart stopped too, because it was then that they tipped over, went into a nosedive, and exploded with such violence that a single one could destroy an entire building.

* The future War Minister under de Gaulle, and Prime Minister under Pompidou.

I took refuge with some English friends who had built a small brick shelter at the back of their garden which could withstand the effects of bombing, except from a direct hit. In the morning, when we went upstairs to wash and shave, we took the precaution of leaving the door open in order to avoid being trapped inside.

During the daytime, one had to control one's nerves. Since the building in which my office was located was considered sufficiently solid, we were not allowed to go down into the shelters. In the depths of the London Underground, there was total security. As we returned to ground level, we'd glance uneasily at the sign posted next to the ticket office: green meant all clear; red was the alert signal. Whatever it was, we had to emerge, ears pricked, ready to throw ourselves to the ground as soon as any nearby V1 ceased its roaring noise.

Street traffic continued even during the alerts. But it required pluck to take a taxi; it was a question of trusting to fate. The taxi-drivers seemed to be either deaf or insensitive to danger. With no defence against the V1, more vulnerable than anybody else, they will always remain in my mind a living symbol of unshakeable courage.

This reminds me of a cartoon I saw at about that time: it showed a group of high-ranking officers in solemn conference, seemingly impassive, their nervous tension betrayed only by their ears – which were six feet long!

Later on, after the landings, came the V2: ballistic rockets that travelled faster than sound and fell at random. No alert was possible; no anti-aircraft fire could warn of their approach.

Nevertheless, life went on. But it was preferable to dine in restaurants located in a basement, or to shun the tables next to a window in order at least to avoid being injured by flying glass.

London in wartime. A scene, an atmosphere I'll never forget.

Stolidly cheerful and pleasant, always ready to share one's troubles, the British were no more inclined to display their emotions than in peacetime. They obviously expected the same behaviour from others. Faced with obstacles, difficulties, destruction, risk and sorrow of all kinds, they managed to hide their heroism behind the banal routine of daily life. I was constantly reminded of my mother's oft-repeated precept: 'Keep yourself to yourself.'

For a Frenchman whose country had just suffered a crushing defeat and had lost confidence in its destiny, the English attitude was reassuring; it set a good example. My anglophile upbringing had undoubtedly conditioned me to this kind of behaviour; but I noticed that the French in London, even though they were anonymous individuals in that mass of Englishmen, ended up by adopting, almost despite themselves, the placid virtues

of their hosts. They too refused to fake, to cheat, and while there may have been a little traffic in clothing coupons, none of them would have dreamed of dealing with a black market.

Even during the darkest moments of the war, the British authorities refused to give the population a feeling of police surveillance, almost as if they chose to ignore the existence of espionage and counter-espionage; and yet the Germans managed to infiltrate a sufficient number of spies – in 'typically British' disguise. I never heard of a curfew; never was I asked to show my identity papers; nor were any of my friends, British or foreign, ever questioned about where they were going or coming from. The respect for civil liberties survived the war intact. When I happened to see policemen, it was generally after a bombing raid. The British also knew how to forget their political differences and to present the enemy with a truly united front.

But I hadn't come to London to make a sociological study of a nation under bombardment. I was there to participate in the war.

At first the only person I knew in London was Jacques Bingen, André Citroën's brother-in-law, and my best friend before the war. He was also a member of our business group: impressed by his intelligence and ability, I had named him general manager of the SAGA, a subsidiary of the Compagnie du Nord.

Although we were close friends, I learned only later that he was working for the Secret Service. Parachuted into the southern zone of France, he was arrested in a train and taken to the headquarters of the Kommandatur; a slight irregularity in his identity papers had aroused suspicion. He knew that it is during the first few hours following one's arrest, when one is most likely to feel depressed, that one must seek a means of escape. A window was open; he jumped into space. But some peasants, taking him for a burglar, denounced him to the Germans. Afraid that he might reveal his secrets under torture, he swallowed the poison in the phial that was always concealed on his person. Only after the Liberation, while we were still trying to find him, did I learn of his heroic death.

Whom to see? Whom to turn to? The Free French came and went, all the more so since they didn't form a permanent community. True, there was a club where one could go for lunch, find French cigarettes and join the other French who met there to resume their usual habits . . .

I hadn't the slightest interest in paving the way for some political career. It was soon evident to me that everyone in General de Gaulle's entourage with any semblance of rank or influence tried to keep at a distance the new arrivals who might threaten their jobs or impede their ambitions; each of them instinctively defended his position. Nobody therefore offered me a

responsible role, and since I was loath to become involved in games of intrigue (I hardly ever saw Gaston Palewski, although I knew him well), I confined myself to my strictly military duties, a field in which I felt at ease.

By this time the ostracism of the early Gaullists towards those who arrived in London later was a thing of the past. (A friend of mine had been with the General since June of 1940, assuming the modest post of recruiting officer. He told me that the men who joined in July – of the same year! – were jeered, as if they had taken an unduly long time to make up their minds.)

In 1943, only a few military men remained in London. The most experienced officers had already been assigned to form new combat units, or to the Leclerc Division, or the French Army in Africa. The others had no choice but to settle down at headquarters – or become secretly involved in 'more serious matters' . . .

De Gaulle was not only head of the Free French Forces, he was now the leader of the Resistance Movement inside France as well. We learned of his underground activity from agents returning from France who gave us briefings before leaving on a new mission or being whisked away by the Secret Service. I remember the underground network leaders Henri Fresnay and Lucie Aubrac . . . and I can still hear the actress Françoise Rosay address us at Wimbledon, where I was on a training course; the outwardly self-composed British officers could not hold back their tears as she spoke. We thus knew all about what was going on in Occupied France.

Apart from the Free French, there were many other foreign groups in London: those, for example, which depended on the various governments in exile: Polish, Czech, Dutch. They wore identical battledress; only from the badges bearing the name of their country and their rank could one tell who they were. To the British, all these Europeans living in England were Allies, and all were treated on an equal footing. Only the Americans were different. They wore different uniforms, they were better paid, less disciplined, more cynical, louder; they walked with a loose-jointed gait as in their cowboy films; but if they were criticized at all, it was quite unfair.

The Gaullists in London were united by certain ideas which they flaunted with an almost grotesque panache.

A genuine Gaullist was above all a rebel at heart. The legal French nation – its government and administration, the restrictions it felt obliged to accept – was categorically rejected, even repudiated. For some, this attitude contained a germ of revolution. Over-stepping the bounds of legality had not been easy for all of them, and many had the feeling of having crossed the Rubicon.

A Gaullist therefore looked upon himself as an outlaw, probably

condemned to death in absentia, not knowing if he'd ever be able to return to France, and if so, what that France would be like.

A Gaullist felt like a stateless person; more precisely, he thought he might never again find his country as he wished it to be. Many, having escaped by the first available boat without a return ticket, had no legal residence any more. We might consider ourselves an outpost of our country if we liked, but the fact was that things could very well turn out badly for us. Of course, we knew that the British wouldn't throw us out; but very few of us had a domicile outside France. As for the others, they'd either have to reconcile themselves to becoming naturalized citizens of some foreign country, or to leading the life of eternal exiles. This feeling of being cut off from our homeland varied in intensity according to individual character. But it created a sort of club spirit: a strong sense of the solidarity that binds together exiles and all those who have lost their native ties.

Finally, a Gaullist (but not his leader) was a doubter. While we who had made our way to London were convinced of having made the right choice, of being on the right side, we still held endless discussions about the nature of the post-war regime, the chances of survival for Vichyism, the risk of civil war, the unknown future that awaited us. Would the government be leftist, and if so, how far left? A member of the Resistance had assured us that the French had changed over to our side: 'Even the Gendarmerie is in a state of rebellion'! But I still worried about the possible residue left behind by a Vichyist bourgeoisie and an anti-semitism more virulent than ever.

Writing these lines some forty years later, it occurs to me that there is a constant in our national psychology. Everyone agrees that France is a reasonable, sensible nation, even bordering on conservatism. But every few dozen years, the river suddenly overflows its banks and there is a break with the past. If one can trust the lessons of several centuries of history, it all ends in a return to order; the river recedes into its bed again. However, at each crisis, despite their long experience, the French lack confidence in their future; they lack faith in their collective common sense as well as in their power of recovery.

I'd been recalled to London on assignment to the MMLA (Mission Militaire de Liaison Administrative), directed by Hettier de Boislambert and created by order of General de Gaulle. The Americans had devised a project for governing the liberated French territories, the AMGOT (Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories), and had already trained in American universities more than 1,500 men to establish an Anglo-Saxon type of government in France. They were also supposed to ensure a veritable Allied military administration at the rear of the liberated

territories. In 1943, de Gaulle, fearing that this would be no more than another Occupation on the heels of the German one, and with the same dire effect, created a 'Corps Militaire de Liaisons Administratives', directly dependent on the French Committee for National Liberation, which would specialize in training French officers. In 1944, Boislambert was given the responsibility of forming and commanding the MMLA. More than 1,200 officers were therefore trained, assigned to 'all places and at all levels of the Allied units, in order to ensure their liaison with the French populations, to re-establish the administrations, to replace them wherever necessary'.

Boislambert had the reputation of being something of a ladies' man, but still found time for politics. Involved in the Dakar affair, he had made a spectacular escape and finally reached London. He now had the rank of Colonel.

After a training course at Wimbledon, I assumed my new functions along with a glorious title: Head of the Third Bureau. (The First Bureau was concerned with Personnel, the Second with Information, the Third with Military Operations, and the Fourth with Ordnance.) For the first time in my military career, I had a staff job: sorting out the volunteers, deciding on their training as liaison officers, and finally assigning them to one of the English operational units I thought they were best fitted for. Frenchmen of all ages and ranks passed through my hands. The future relationship between the Allied armies and the French government, with or without the intervention of our Mission, was a political problem that didn't concern me. But it was up to me alone to see that our affairs were properly conducted as far as liaison with the British was concerned.

It was very time-consuming work, since I had to deal with a large number of volunteers. I made arrangements by telephone from my office, and I was as deluged with calls as a telephone operator at peak hours! I worked in close collaboration and perfect harmony with an English officer of the same rank (I'd received my Captain's stripes from Algiers), whose duties were to ratify, if possible, my proposals and take charge of my recruits.

Once I'd succeeded in providing a suitable post of some kind or other for one and all, I found myself without a job! Boislambert announced to me one morning:

'Now you're going to run the Fourth Bureau and procure equipment for all these men!'

And I assumed my new functions at once.

To return for a moment to Camberley and to one of my first assignments – as standard-bearer of the Free French – I remember two amusing incidents.

I had the honour of carrying the flag simply because I was the only officer there who'd been awarded a 1939–40 Croix de Guerre. There were regular parade drills for the troops in the camp. Sometimes they were required to perform a guard of honour; sometimes they were called upon to parade through the streets of London on some solemn occasion. On 14 July 1943, for example, we marched through the capital to the Wellington Barracks in celebration (in that royal site!) of Bastille Day. As I passed through the gate, I saw a crowd of two people watching us: Baby and Chiquita Carcano, the daughters of the Argentine Ambassador to London. Touched by their presence, I gave them a friendly wink.

When General Giraud came to London, I was witness to and actor in a comical scene: Giraud was then at crossed swords with de Gaulle. The Gaullists believed that the American strategy consisted of using Giraud as a pawn, with the sole purpose of opposing the Gaullist movement. The Free French soldiers were very hostile to him; there was even talk of assassinating 'the traitor Giraud'. Aware of the tension in the air, the British asked us to arrive in London the night before and march across the entire city – an exhausting exercise which would have to be repeated the next day at dawn! They were obviously hoping to calm our belligerence. Some Gaullists, however, continued to accuse Giraud of every evil and categorically rejected anyone who seemed to have the slightest connection with Vichy. It should be added that their intolerant attitude, typical of the French mentality, was just as prevalent among the Vichyists in France. Personally, I was opposed to Giraud not because I saw him as a tool of the Americans, but because it seemed to me that between the two leaders there was about the same disproportion as between the sun and the earth.

So here came Giraud to inspect the French troops in front of Carlton Gardens. As standard-bearer, my position was slightly in front of the troops, facing Giraud, who was only a few yards away. I knew that he'd been a prisoner, and I was familiar with the story of his escape; but I also knew that while he might belong to the anti-German faction of Vichy, he nevertheless considered de Gaulle an adventurer with ulterior political ambitions.

A vague expression, a sad little moustache, a pot-belly, he wasn't a very prepossessing figure. Suddenly his wandering eye, till then scanning the horizon, lit upon the flag I held. He seemed to wake up, visibly intrigued, and I could see that he was trying to read the inscription on it. Did he suspect some Gaullist slogan, perhaps hostile to himself? The flag was gently fluttering in the breeze. Giraud, standing at attention like myself, tried to shift his position imperceptibly, increasingly irritated by being unable to make out what was, in fact, the perfectly banal slogan: 'Honneur

et Patrie' (Honour and Country). I decided to keep him in suspense, and each time he shifted to one side, I did the same, just as imperceptibly, maliciously savouring my little game.

The officers often served as 'stop-gaps', called upon without warning to perform all sorts of functions for which they were in no way prepared. As always with the military, we were deluged with memoranda: one of them requested everyone with a diploma to make himself known. Due to my Law degree, I thus found myself filling the role of defence lawyer whenever our courts martial had to judge French soldiers. Most of the cases concerned some harmless fellow who had merely gone AWOL, although he was charged with desertion. De Gaulle was even more determined to prove his respect for French Republican legality than to assert his own authority. In his mind, France itself was now installed in London; he insisted that the smallest details substantiate this view. For example, he saw to it that the Free French troops were supplied with the traditional *Caporal* cigarettes, like any other French soldiers worthy of the name.

The military judges were for the most part elderly (not to say decrepit) officers, devoid of sensitivity. I remember in particular one calloused veteran who considered every defendant an unstable neurotic, on the astonishing pretext that the soldier had come to London when he could have quietly remained in France! This kind of prejudice – inappropriate, to say the least, on the part of a judge – inspired me to take my job seriously and to throw my heart into impassioned, idealistic pleas for the defence.

One case was graver than most. A French deserter had been arrested by the British and locked up in the Allied military prison at Dundee, in Scotland. The French military authorities sent a court-martial officer to interrogate him, and I accompanied him in my role of court-appointed defence lawyer. During the fourteen- or fifteen-hour train ride, we had ample time to discuss the case, and finally made a deal on a verdict of clemency, on condition that the accused accept the line of defence I would suggest to him. Alas, I found myself dealing with an ignorant, narrow-minded boy who would hear nothing of it. When his case came to trial, I was no longer in London.

'Fortunately, there are Sundays', Georges Pompidou said one day. His words never rang truer than during this period in London. A weekend in the country with friends or relatives was more than a parenthesis in daily life for me; it was a moment of grace. Idle mornings, conversation in front of a blazing fire, walks in the woods without having to scrutinize the sky . . .

I gradually resumed contact with some of my English cousins and other

members of the family. I spent several weekends with Jimmy and Dollie de Rothschild at Waddesdon. Jimmy was an eccentric. Tall, with a large, elongated head, a nose like a circumflex accent, and large hands and fingers, he always wore a hat tilted over his brow, which gave him an unusual appearance. He and my father had been very close, as were my cousin Dollie and my mother. The son of Baron Edmond, the Frenchman who founded the first Jewish settlements in Palestine, Jimmy had been an unhappy child. He ran away from home, enlisted as a cabin-boy in the Merchant Navy . . . and was finally traced to Australia. His father then sent him to a British university, and Jimmy fell in love with England. He became a naturalized citizen, and was even ultimately elected to Parliament.

My cousins had their own occupations, and I tried to bother them as little as possible. Sometimes I'd have lunch at the bank with Anthony, and once met Anthony Eden there. But I saw less than I'd have liked of Victor (Lord Rothschild), whose scientific research was already widely recognized, and whose vast culture made a deep impression on me. On the other hand, I saw a lot of his sister, Miriam Lane. Very talented, very interested in entomology, she frequented intellectual circles and, thanks to her, I discovered a fascinating world. Her husband, Hungarian by birth and a great sportsman, was a member of the British Commandos. Parachuted into France, he was captured by the Germans, and Miriam lived in torment – although she knew that he'd been interrogated by Rommel himself, who had the reputation of being a gentleman.

While we were having lunch together one day, I happened to mention how much I'd admired Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, which had just been published in America. Miriam invited me to her country house the following weekend, and I had the surprise of meeting Koestler in person.

A small man with a receding forehead, thick black hair slicked back, and a nervous, twitching face, Koestler was not very imposing at first sight. He often invited me to his little house in Chelsea, where he lived with a charming girl, Mamaine Paget. He was so thoughtful that he went so far as to bring me breakfast in bed, a practically surrealistic luxury in those days of austerity! He introduced me to several of his friends, and from then on we formed a group that spent its leisure time discussing, making and remaking the world according to our dreams.

Koestler had first fled from Hungary to France, where he was interned in a camp, eyed with suspicion as were all the refugees from Central Europe. He was subsequently subjected to the same fate in England, but one of his close friends, who was Undersecretary of State for Aviation, vouched for his 'political honorability'!

He was a celebrity – and a controversial figure. His denouncement of the

Communist concentration camps came at a time when pro-Soviet sympathy was at its height, at the very moment when our valiant Russian allies were causing Hitler a lot of trouble.

But he was above all preoccupied, tormented even, by the nightmarish fate of the Jews; his mother was Jewish and could not leave Hungary. The same dream returned to haunt him every night: he was on a road, pursued by assassins; as hard as he tried to scream, no sound came from his lips; he was unable to summon help. This dream summarized all the anguish of Koestler, the prophet: knowing the truth, but unable to convince others, whether it was alerting the world to the massacre of the Jews, or unmasking the Soviet régime. His failure to influence the Allied governments, to persuade them to come to the aid of the deportees, plunged him in despair. Thanks to him, I no longer had any illusions about the fate of Jews sent to the so-called 'work camps'. Many people, however, still refused to accept the truth. Churchill himself, it seems, asked for proof the first time he was told about 'the final solution'. Perhaps the reason why the Allied governments hesitated to denounce officially what was going on in the camps was because they were afraid that public opinion would then clamour for the premature opening of a second front. In any case, when the Allies liberated Auschwitz, it was hard for me to understand their apparent surprise at what they found there.

A disciple of Jabotinsky, Koestler was not only concerned by the fate of Palestine, but was also an impassioned, militant Zionist. A former Communist, he probably still had a guilty, romantic weakness for conspiracy and violence. He was endowed with the marvellous gift of being able to communicate to others his ideas and emotions. He asked questions in order to develop an analysis; then analysed further in order to find more questions to ask; and he would go on indefinitely, unable to stop.

He spoke fluent English, but with a very pronounced Hungarian accent. The day he was released from his London prison, an incident led him to doubt the sanity of the British who, after putting him in jail, now made him the most peculiar propositions.

Not knowing where to turn, he entered a telephone booth to call his only friend in England. At that time, all phone calls had to go through an operator who would announce the cost of the communication. To Arthur's ear, the English language must have sounded as he himself pronounced it. Instead of the innocent phrase: 'Put your pennies in the slot', he understood the operator to say: 'Put your penis in the slot' – a suggestion that understandably astonished him!

For a long time I'd wanted to introduce him to Isaiah Berlin, who was back in London, and whose reputation for intellectual brilliance and sparkling wit was already known to Koestler. I invited them both to lunch

one day with Felicity Rumbold, the wife of a diplomat, at La Corvette, one of my favourite restaurants, not far from the Free French offices. Koestler arrived, nervous as usual; but he also seemed to be afraid of something. He relaxed a little when Felicity told him she was a great admirer of his; but when Isaiah began to talk, dazzling as always, Arthur, to my surprise, either didn't know how or didn't care to meet the challenge and remained stubbornly silent. Mysterious failure of a meeting – too well-planned, perhaps?

Among the friends of Freddie Ayer, a fellow Oxford professor of Isaiah Berlin's, I met George Orwell, who was already famous for the sinister view of the world he described in his book, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Tall, gaunt, hollow-cheeked, taciturn and shy, he wasn't very sociable. Moreover, he viewed the future through glasses as black as the ink in which he dipped his pen. Joseph Kessel passed through London once or twice and joined our group, but I didn't see him often after the war.

When the Germans occupied the southern zone of France, the security in which I was then living in New York had made me very ill at ease. I worried about the members of my family who'd stayed with us at La Bourboule and was reassured only when I learned that they had made their way to Spain. The warmth of our reunion in London was a measure of our past emotions.

My cousin James was the first to arrive, with his wife Claude and their daughters, Nicole and Monique. A pilot in World War I, James resumed his service in the Air Force. Claude and her daughters volunteered for the women's section of the Free French Forces, an invaluable auxiliary corps which rendered even greater service after the Normandy landings. Claude did so well, displaying such a sense of organization and responsibility, that she became second in command, a function she assumed with courage and determination; she knew how to inspire obedience and respect.

Philippe, James's brother, also joined us in London and, at his request, I arranged for his assignment as liaison officer to a combat unit.

Time passed. During the first days of spring in 1944, the only subject of conversation was the Allied landing. Everyone was hoping for it, but many people still overestimated the strength of the Germans. We all knew that the operation presented enormous risks and that the difficulties involved in pulling it off successfully were causing the Anglo-Americans to hesitate.

There were optimists; there were doubters. Among the latter, Freddie Ayer accused the General Staff of lacking offensive spirit. One day in May 1944, I had lunch with him and Pierre Messmer; the landing was the principal topic of conversation. (Messmer, a hero of Bir-Hakeim, shared an office with me at the MMLA, and at the same time pursued other

activities I then knew nothing about.) I was more optimistic and disagreed with Freddie Ayer. I betted on an imminent landing. Pierre Messmer offered to be a witness – the stakes were a luncheon in liberated Paris – but he insisted that we name a precise date for D-Day. At random, I picked . . . the sixth of June! And Freddie accepted the wager.

I'd forgotten all about it when I met Messmer in Paris a few months later and he reminded me of my bet. Only then did he confess that he'd asked for a precise date because he was already informed of it. But nothing in his behaviour had betrayed him, and neither Freddie nor I could ever have imagined that he was concealing such a vital secret.

On 6 June we heard the news over the radio: the Allies had landed in Normandy. I literally jumped with joy! But we were not taking part in the great adventure and felt a bit left out of things.

My job at the MMLA no longer made sense. It was at this point that André Manuel, aide to Colonel Passy, who was head of the BCRA (Bureau Central de Renseignements et d'Action), spoke to me about a mission that sounded most exciting: it was something to do with the French Resistance. I awaited my new orders with impatience. Nothing happened. I was finally given to understand that there was an unsurmountable obstacle: my name. It may have been that someone more resourceful or more influential had volunteered – but that is the excuse I was given. I came across a letter I wrote to Alix in a mood of frustration and anger:

> In April, I was promised a far more interesting job than anything I could have dreamed of. However, a few weeks later, when the MMLA headquarters staff was reorganized, I found myself in a job that is less important than before and very dull besides. Later, I had the proof of what I suspected: my name had been the obstacle. To the right wing, a Jew; to the leftists, a capitalist . . .
>
> The outbreak of anti-semitism among the Free French in London can be explained by their urgent desire to return to France, and their fear that the important proportion of Jews might be a hindrance. When Jews joined up, they'd been only too eager to utilize them; but now that their presence might cause them embarrassment, instead of honouring the principles for which this war is supposedly being fought, they are simply being dropped . . .

This reference to anti-semitism may cause surprise. The word was undoubtedly exaggerated, coming from my pen in a fit of anger. But it is undeniable that there was an awareness of the Jewish presence, due to the large number of them who had, for obvious reasons, left France and joined de Gaulle. Hoping to discredit the Resistance movement, Vichy had only too often reminded people of the fact for anyone to have forgotten it. The truth is that the French were still living in the past; and the idea of another

Popular Front, with its revolutionary aspects, still made many bourgeois shake in their boots.

Towards the end of July, I was assigned to the staff of General Koenig, and a few days later was sent to SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces), a huge camp hidden in a forest near Portsmouth. While I was being given an introductory tour of the camp, I heard an English colonel shouting into his radio-telephone as I passed in front of his tent:

'Well, sir, has the enemy got a bloody nose?'

We had lunch in the American-serviced mess: Boeuf Bourguignon and hot chocolate. I survived . . . but still remember that nauseating mixture.

By the end of the week, I was ordered to proceed to France; an advance section of SHAEF had just set up base at Granville in western Normandy.

I crossed the Channel on a landing ship. Everything seemed so peaceful that I slept in my pyjamas, my soul at rest, without even a passing thought for my trans-Atlantic adventure. I set foot on French soil in a state of emotion one can imagine. But even a Norman would not have recognized his familiar landscape. Every inch of space within sight seemed to be occupied by various military vehicles moving in all directions, like a disorderly colony of ants.

After a few days at Granville, I was ordered to proceed to Paris. Liberated Paris.

By chance, an American officer I'd met in Morocco in 1941 offered me a seat in his command car. It was a long journey through battlefields still littered with all sorts of war *matériel*; the itineraries under Allied army control were not the most direct routes!

As I recall, we didn't see a soul. A disabled enemy tank here and there. But otherwise, bare and desolate scenery, leafless trees, most of them felled. And the horrible stench of death that grabbed us by the throat as we drove past Falaise: the soldiers killed during the final combats had not yet been buried.

But as we approached Paris the countryside became increasingly cheerful, and I almost forgot the war.

On the outskirts of the city, we saw the first human beings. A return to the world of the living. Bystanders tirelessly cheered the waves of liberators parading past, as they'd been doing without respite for several days.

Nearly five years had passed since I'd last seen my native city. Five years! As if Paris had been wiped out of my life. We drove through the Bois de Boulogne and all of a sudden, as we reached the Porte Dauphine, I realized how much all this meant to me. This city, erased from the face of the earth, Paris lost, Paris out of bounds, it was embedded in my heart. All at once I was engulfed in a flood of memories from my childhood, my youth,

my entire life. The familiar neighbourhoods, the faces of friends, the voices I was going to hear again at last.

But I had no time for reverie at the moment. There were practical problems to be solved: first of all, where to find living quarters. On whose door should I knock first? I finally decided on Barbara and André Vagliano, the friends with whom I used to play golf before the war.

I said goodbye to my American companion at the Porte Dauphine, walked a few hundred yards, and rang the doorbell, my heart beating fast. It was decidedly my day of glory: the entire family was there, and everyone greeted me as if I'd just returned from the moon. We talked until we ran out of breath, until it was time for dinner – to which I made my modest contribution of K rations, which was all I had to offer.

A bed! A telephone! I called René Fillon, who was still managing the bank as well as my family's interests. Through the receiver, if I may use the expression, we fell into each other's arms.

The next morning I borrowed a bicycle and rode to the Etoile, then down the Champs-Elysées, as in a dream. The sun was shining; the girls, also on bicycles, seemed each one prettier than the next, and I can still see their wooden-soled shoes, the wide skirts that floated in the breeze.

I wrote a reassuring letter to my family in America:

> The Allied and French soldiers were given a fantastic welcome. Each man seems to have two women on his knees, and tents in the public gardens resound all night long with roars of laughter and joyful shouting. The Americans seem to believe, perhaps rightly so, that Paris is one huge PX for dispensing feminine tenderness to lonely GIs. The FFI, for the most part very young and far from shy (among whom mingle some pretty seedy individuals who look more like gangsters), are all dressed in civilian clothes with a tricolor armband; they rush about, machine-gun in one hand, a girl on the other arm, brandishing hand grenades and flags. Paris bears few traces of combat, the city is intact. No public transport, little food, no restaurants, the shops are still closed, only the cafés are open.

I paid a visit to our office on the rue Laffitte. Only a dozen people were working there; the rest of the staff and employees were still in La Bourboule, awaiting a solution to various personal and collective problems.

I'd barely arrived when I was greeted like a hero by the man the Vichy government had placed in charge of the sequestration of the bank! As a matter of fact, he had always been wholeheartedly on our side and was only too happy to be relieved at last of the task of liquidating the family possessions. That same day, the Bank of France officially returned to 'Messieurs de Rothschild Frères' the account number which had been ours for over a century. I had the impression that it was my birthday.

*

I found the conditions of life much more rigorous in Paris than in London. The cold, for instance. The winter of 1944–5 was very severe. The buildings hadn't been heated since the beginning of the Occupation. It required a certain amount of courage to go to bed, sliding between damp, chilly sheets.

Social life resumed. The Cercle Interallié was reopened as the Maison des Alliés, reserved for all of the armed forces and their guests. There were also a few night-clubs.

I remember an incident that almost ended badly. An entertainer had just sung 'Lili Marlene', the theme song of the Afrika Korps, and the audience was indignant; some of them wanted to lynch her. As the fever mounted, Pierre Messmer jumped onto the stage and assured the angry spectators that at Bir-Hakeim, where he had fought, the Allies had adopted the same song.

Needless to say, as soon as it was evident that the Germans were going to be defeated, every Frenchman was suddenly a Gaullist. Some out of necessity, others from opportunism, most by conviction and enthusiasm. And Paris mixed them all together: English, Americans, Free French, all of them were liberators.

There were, of course, some painful incidents. A few days after the Liberation, I attended a private party. A Free French officer suddenly recognized among the guests a man (whose name I prefer not to mention) who was a notorious collaborator with the Gestapo. He was asked to leave, accompanied by his wife . . . and by the icy silence of the other guests, who lined up in two long rows between which he had to pass in order to reach the door. In all my life I have never witnessed a more humiliating scene.

In my official capacity as liaison officer to the Seine Base Section (my office was in the Invalides), I had to take action against a Frenchman accused of collaboration. I felt it my moral duty to order him to leave the Allied offices at once. He feigned surprise, seemed not to understand . . . but I'm sure that he was not as innocent as he pretended to be.

However, this sort of occurrence was rare – with the exception of a few notorious individuals who bore the badge of infamy for a long time. For example, the owner of an important racing stable had his face publicly slapped one day at Longchamp – by a man who was, moreover, not entirely irreproachable himself. A few years after the war, the same owner had the luck to win the Arc de Triomphe two years running; fearing the hostile reaction of the crowd, he didn't even dare to leave his box.

The Jewish community also had its share of unhappy scandals. A survivor sued one of his fellow Jews, whom he accused of having saved his own life at the cost of that of one of his relatives. I was a member of the jury

appointed to judge the case. It was a typical example of the agonizing situation faced by a persecuted people in distress. One couldn't expect all of them to be saints. The real culprits were the Nazis who had created such inhuman circumstances.

At Christmas time, I finally was able to spend a week in New York with the members of my family that I hadn't seen for the past twenty-four months. My son David was just two years old, and we celebrated his birthday; he was already beginning to pronounce a few words. Since I was one of the first eye-witnesses to the Liberation of Paris that the French colony had seen as yet, I was continually asked to describe it in the greatest detail.

I flew back to Paris via Canada and England, in Arctic weather, carrying with me the first package of penicillin sent to France, which I'd been entrusted to deliver to the Minister of Health.

A few months later, Alix landed at Le Havre with her daughter Lili, the faithful Lilah, and David, already beyond the baby stage . . .

And then the peace treaty was signed.

Some people never get over having lived through an exceptional experience. They spend the rest of their lives reminiscing about their personal Golden Age: those who proved themselves in combat, for example; and those for whom the war was the happiest moment of their lives (and such people do exist). Some members of the Resistance mix only with other members of the Resistance; it sometimes happens that a war hero, unable to readjust to civilian life, becomes an outlaw.

The French in London will always look back upon their experience as a privileged moment, exceptional in every way: the example of the British, their instinctive, daily courage. Although I'd occupied only a modest post, for me too London was a unique experience.

What a contrast with America! From New York, I've retained only the recollection of my family, of Alix, and the birth of our son . . . but against a background of profound dissatisfaction. It was a period of neutrality, of indecision; I was outside the war and trying to get back in it. But in England there was danger, important events were taking place right there, there were responsibilities to assume, unexpected encounters.

How strange is the alchemy of memory! My life in wartime London which was, after all, comparatively insignificant and limited, has become in retrospect as colourful as an epic. Without romanticism or sentimentality, without embellishing the facts, I think I can say that in London I had the opportunity to feel as if I were part of the great adventure of indomitable Britain, fighting for its life.

Back in France, I never had the slightest sense of superiority over those

of my compatriots who, by choice or obligation, had stayed at home. On the contrary, I've always felt I'd had the luck to be able to grasp a golden opportunity: to participate, if only on a modest level, in one of the most glorious chapters in the history of Britain.

So many years have passed since then, so many things have happened, that I've lost contact with the people I met during those few months: the whims of fortune have led us down different paths. Even when I happen to run into Pierre Messmer, we never talk of our life during those days.

At an annual cocktail party given by the British Ambassador in Paris, Jacques Fauvet summed up in a phrase the feeling that remains in the hearts of the Free French who were in London: 'Today for us it is the visit of grateful fidelity.'

A few simple words. And suddenly we were back in London, reliving that extraordinary era. It had been a unique moment in our lives of which we were proud, for which we were grateful, which was illuminated by friendship and admiration. England had brought out the best in us.

CHAPTER

11

Guy, Alain, Elie*

I recently came across a memorandum dated January, 1946, in which I wrote:

> What is the situation in France? The country is taking an anti-capitalistic turn like most of Europe. It is, of course, impossible to affirm that the present rate of nationalization, of measures hostile to big corporations (it is now forbidden to create new limited companies) will continue unabated. But the trend is evident.
>
> Moreover, the French currency is the worst managed of all the major nations, as badly as that of Balkan and South American countries; in 1946, the French franc is worth only one-fortieth of its 1941 value. There is no comparison with England, Belgium, Holland, and even less with the United States and Switzerland . . . We must consider it an intrinsic weakness of the French economy.
>
> It is clear that private wealth in any anti-capitalistic country with a shrinking currency is doomed to disappear sooner or later. And one day or another, this same anti-capitalism will lead to the suppression of private banks . . .
>
> We must make a choice: either continue to live at home where we belong, accepting the inevitable diminishment of our patrimony, training our children to learn a trade, to become industrial technicians, farmers . . . or we can refuse to relinquish the tremendous asset of our name: let some of us remain in France to maintain our presence here; let others settle in the United States and develop a business that will be a continuation of the House of Rothschild. We would thus re-establish our 'international good will' and remain a factor in the world of international finance.
>
> To live in France in prosperous retirement is a mediocre goal. To create a Rothschild Bank in America is an endeavour worthy of the Five Gentlemen of Frankfurt.

Read today, these lines are startling. I certainly erred in my view of the political future, fearing, like many others at that time, Soviet domination of Europe. But my analysis was correct – alas! – concerning the socializa-

* The three partners of de Rothschild Frères were always named in decreasing order of age.

tion of France and the future of private banking. When I consider how little I followed my own thinking, I wonder what is finally the determining factor in human behaviour. One always hopes, no doubt, that bleak forecasts will not come true, and that the worst is never an absolute certainty. Moreover, our freedom of action is much more limited than we would like to believe: we can neither escape a certain determinism of our environment nor radically alter the course of our life as a result of essentially unverifiable abstract thinking. Is this due to faint-heartedness, to lack of confidence in our ideas? I wonder . . .

The tangible is attractive; the future, hypothetical. I had a home, a profession, an environment, associates, friends, a family, a ready set course and an obvious predilection for the life that lay ahead of me. I'd been lucky enough to survive the war unscathed; I was eager to assume the role of a Rothschild banker in France, determined to rejuvenate our firm and restore the family prestige.

On my return to France in 1944, even before I was demobilized, I had become, in fact, the head of Messieurs de Rothschild Frères. My cousins Alain and Elie, Robert de Rothschild's sons, were about to return from POW camps, where they had been treated like any other French officers: the German Army respected the international conventions (although Elie had to sleep in a hut reserved for Jewish officers during his five years of imprisonment).

After the collapse of France in 1940, I had borne alone the responsibility of saving what could be saved, and as soon as Paris was liberated, I'd given a new start to the establishment. Since the death of my great-uncle Edmond, my father and my uncle Robert were the only surviving partners of their generation; they handed over the reins to the next one, of which I was the senior member. As *primus inter pares*, first among equals, I became for all practical purposes the managing partner, as I was to remain for thirty-five years.

Although my training was insufficient, although there was no experienced associate who might have guided and inspired me, although I had no particular course in mind for our development . . . I didn't hesitate a moment. I buckled down to my task with resolution. First of all, there were the everyday problems to be tackled, and there were plenty of them.

During the period between the two World Wars, our firm had participated in very little financial or banking activity; its principal function had been to come to the aid of our Viennese cousins when they were in trouble. Add to this semi-stagnation the four years of liquidation following the 1940 defeat, and one can imagine the state of affairs of the 'dear old

bank'! On my return to liberated Paris in 1944, I found only half a dozen employees (with whom I often shared a meagre lunch in the basement room placed at our disposal, the rest of the building having been requisitioned by the Secours National, a national welfare organization created by the Vichy government). The remaining assets consisted of a few clients, a handful of securities, and far from enough cash to operate a financial institution.

Another less than rosy side of the picture was the presence in La Bourboule, where the firm had taken refuge, of a hundred employees, most of them seventy to eighty years old, who had been kept on the payroll for evident humanitarian reasons. At the top management level, I was assisted by René Fillon and Roger Langlois; notwithstanding their outstanding achievements during the Occupation, neither of them was a professional banker. I enlisted André Legros, the NCO accountant of my Company in 1940, who had been working since then at the Crédit Lyonnais; but his banking experience was limited to that of a branch manager.

I must remind my younger readers in particular that the War and the Occupation had ruined the country to such an extent that even a return to the economic level of 1939, modest as it was, seemed like an unattainable dream. Among all the economic experts I talked to at the time, not one of them foresaw the fantastic expansion which in thirty years would promote France to one of the top positions in the European economy. Nothing in the inscrutable future encouraged a strategy of revolutionary change; besides, I didn't want to upset my father in any way during his few remaining years.

Despite the circumstances, which might be euphemistically described as not very attractive, I was determined to put the French Rothschilds back on the map, and to prepare a resurgence worthy of the family reputation and of its prestigious past.

My first task consisted of recuperating the family investments that the Vichy-appointed liquidator had, at our request, sold to friendly firms which had agreed to let us buy them back if and when we could. In the meantime, the government had turned over to us the proceeds from the liquidations of our property since 1940, as was only natural. The transactions were thus accomplished without difficulty.

It soon became apparent to me that while the bank itself had engaged in only limited activity between the two wars due to its small amount of equity, individual members of the family possessed important holdings in various companies of which we were, in fact, the principal share-holders. On the one hand, a drowsy bank; on the other, prosperous businesses, partly due to Rothschild investments. 'Elementary, my dear Watson,' I

said to myself. And I concentrated first of all on the very interesting case of the Compagnie du Nord, which had been traditionally controlled by the rue Laffitte.

Founded by my great-grandfather James, the railways had been nationalized in 1937 – already! But the Company had retained its other assets and continued life as a holding company. It was listed on the Stock Exchange; its capital was dispersed among many shareholders; its future was promising; and my father was still Chairman of the Board. However, it was too soon to exploit its potential, so I turned my attention to other companies of which we were the principal, though silent shareholders.

It was my father who wanted it that way, out of respect for the tradition he'd inherited: the Rothschilds, even when they were majority shareholders, should never in any way be personally associated with a publicly listed company, the principle being to avoid having to make up possible corporate losses out of their own pocket in order to protect their reputation. In line with the same philosophy, my father had always refused to provide investment management services for his clients, saying: 'If they make a profit, they'll consider it their due; if they lose money, they'll say that they were ruined by the Rothschilds.'

Psychologically, he may have been right. However, one should never renounce one's profession through fear of ungrateful or difficult clients.

As a result, my father kept his distance from the companies in which the family had important holdings; he appointed distinguished gentlemen at their head, and listened once a year to what they cared to tell him about the business. Obviously, none of them volunteered to give up the exceptional freedom of action that had virtually been forced upon them; they followed policies of their own choice, some even going so far as to do their banking elsewhere than at the rue Laffitte. I had to put a stop to this; but since I was dealing with highly respectable gentlemen much older than myself, I also had to be extremely tactful – and patient, too.

I eventually got what I wanted: all the companies of our group deposited their cash with us; and all the members of the family again entrusted their investments and their personal bank accounts to the rue Laffitte. The total of all this was still relatively modest, but so were the bank's overhead expenses: we remained in the black. By the end of 1947, our deposits amounted to 150 million 1979 francs (it is on the basis of that year that I've computed all the postwar figures I cite). Thenceforth, our growth was the result of a number of different initiatives, none of them especially spectacular or original, but each one a step forward.

For example, we created a department for handling documentary credits, which in those days were the principal means of settling payment for imports and exports, sometimes involving multiple operations as well

as a certain amount of risk. We also organized an investment management service, and thus cashed in on broker's fees. Constantly on the lookout for every possible means of development, we took part in some unusual projects.

Shortly after the end of the war, the government, in an effort to encourage the French to repatriate the funds they had secretly deposited in Switzerland, set up a procedure that guaranteed anonymity. We effected many such transfers in total secrecy, a member of our staff working under the supervision of a magistrate.

In 1947, the sister companies Royal Dutch and Shell increased their capital by means of a new stock issue. The government was unable to provide the necessary foreign currency for those French investors who wished to subscribe. Together with Lazard Frères, we persuaded the administration to allow these investors to subscribe to their quota of the new issues by using the proceeds from sales of rights and/or old shares; the French foreign exchange balance was thus in no way affected.

A few years later, the German Flick group (whose Nazi activities had not yet been exposed) sold a colliery in the Sarre and was paid with blocked French francs, which they deposited with us. We obtained permission for them to use these funds to purchase five per cent of the Pechiney company. Although they later sold their share, the deal provided Pechiney with the cash it desperately needed at the time, and at the same time protected Flick from a possible loss due to the weakness of the French franc.

Finally, the British company Rio Tinto also floated a new stock issue; this time we obtained from the administration the foreign currency required for the French shareholders to buy up their entire allotment, which amounted to half the capital of the bank.

Negotiations of this sort, along with ordinary daily business, enabled us to keep our head above water. We were also aided by a tax exemption applied to the funds invested in Treasury bills, an incentive created during World War I, which was later repealed. These partly untaxed profits, modest as they were, represented an appreciable positive factor.

Around 1949, I employed an expert to make a study of our accounting system. His conclusion was that this fossil dating from the beginning of the 19th century was so wasteful of manpower that it might be better off if we did no business at all!

We thereupon decided, wisely if audaciously for those days, to install an IBM computer system, at that time in its infancy, which André Legros had gone to America to study. Among the pioneer users in this field, we found it most beneficial to our development. Fortunately, through the good offices of my friend Pierre Chevrier, General Manager of the Banque

Nationale de Paris, I was able to persuade one of the top members of his staff, Gérard Floment-Meurice, to join us as head of our commercial banking department. Now that we had the staff to develop this sector, it began to flourish.

One of our first ventures was the creation of an import-export company called Transocean, whose purpose was to arrange for the exchange of merchandise without the involvement of foreign currency exchange. Although it didn't last very long and provided more disappointments than satisfactions, it is memorable for one reason: its last manager was Georges Pompidou.

The company with the greatest potential, as I've said, was the Compagnie du Nord, of which I'd been Chairman since 1950, after my father died – just in time to stand up to an unexpected challenge: a broker (a man I didn't know) informed me shortly before my first Annual General Meeting that his firm had bought up a lot of shares and intended to engage us in a proxy fight. Our position was strong, but I was not absolutely certain of controlling the majority of votes in a corporation whose shares were widely dispersed among the public. It seemed sensible to negotiate. I was pleasantly surprised by the modesty of the demands: to designate one of our controlling accountants to be put on the list of those who paid out our coupons. This seemed perfectly acceptable to me, and I had reason later to be satisfied with my reaction. However, the incident alerted me to the fact that the financial community harboured doubts as to our strength, doubts which were also directed towards myself, a newcomer on the scene. I had to prove my authority and determination.

One or two years later, a financial gossip sheet hinted that the Compagnie du Nord was concealing important hidden reserves. During the Annual General Meeting I was posed questions which were designed to embarrass me. At first, I replied evasively, and pretended to be disconcerted; then I burst the bubble by citing all of the precise, pertinent statistics. My adversaries walked out of the meeting before the end. And from then on, my position was never again contested. When I became Chairman of Pennaroya, I even won over a broker who had consistently persecuted my predecessor; in fact, he became my strongest supporter.

Having established my reputation, and after these years of consolidation, the time had come to forge ahead.

In 1953 a new law was passed in France which gave investment trusts a favourable tax status compared to holding companies. We therefore set up the S.I. Nord (Société d'Investissement du Nord), with assets from the family and from the Compagnie du Nord, which was able to make a most

profitable tax-free spin-off of its shares in the new investment trust. The transfer to it of our holdings in Shell, Royal Dutch, Nickel, Pennaroya and other French and foreign companies, made us by far the most important shareholders. In 1955, the market was buoyant and the Compagnie du Nord was in a position to issue new shares, bringing in fresh money for investment – and fresh deposits for the bank.

Thus the first stage of redevelopment of Messieurs de Rothschild had been accomplished. The old firm had made a comeback on the French financial scene.

While the bank had always remained our prime interest, the family vineyard of Château Lafite was among the most important assets that we had to manage. It had caused us a lot of worry before the war, and none of us could foretell its future. Elie expressed the desire to take charge of it; Alain and I were delighted to see him assume this responsibility. Let me say at once that he made a marvellous success of it. After many years of remarkable growth and increased prestige, he handed it over to Alain's son Eric, who has carried on his work to the complete satisfaction of all. I am merely a sleeping partner in Château-Lafite, but I follow its development with the greatest interest – and consume its produce with the greatest pleasure! Château-Lafite deserves more than a few lines . . . but the subject in hand is finance, rather than wine.

Back to the bank and my daily activities there. The year 1955 saw the beginning of a boom in oil and raw materials from what was then French Africa, a boom that was to be a major financial factor in the years to come.

We played a dynamic role in developing the riches of the African subsoil and took many initiatives in order to permit the public to participate. It was a relatively brief but happy period, during which we were extremely active. It was made up of various episodes, but I will start with the project to exploit the iron ore in Mauritania and our creation of the MIFERMA company, since I was closely concerned with it and there are amusing anecdotes related to it.

The first step that had to be taken was to remove the Chairman of the skeleton company. Only Gaston Deferre, the Socialist Minister of Overseas Territories, could solve this delicate problem. He received me in his office and mumbled in his characteristic slurred speech that to him I was a symbol of evil capitalism; only because of my honourable war record had he agreed to meet me. Once my original sin had thus been dealt with, we soon found a solution to my problem.

But before the business could really take off, there remained a major difficulty: obtaining a 60 million dollar loan from the World Bank – and

the World Bank was dragging its feet. Wilfrid Baumgartner, Governor of the Bank of France, gave a luncheon in honour of Eugene Black, President of the World Bank, who was in Paris for a brief visit. I was seated next to him (not entirely by accident), and managed to gain his confidence; after the normal formalities, our loan was granted.

I'll never forget that luncheon because of an extraordinary coincidence: after the other guests had left, I accompanied the Governor back to his office. I was surprised to notice on his desk a photograph of a painting by Toqué of Philippe Egalité as a child – it was the painting that belonged to our family collection and was hanging in my house on the rue de Courcelles! Baumgartner explained that the picture had been submitted that very morning for purchase by the Friends of the Château of Versailles. It was the exact replica of ours. After contacting Gérald van der Kemp, the Curator of Versailles, the two paintings were compared; the one they had been offered was a fake. Only by this improbable stroke of luck had the counterfeit been discovered before it was too late.

A few years later, Wilfrid Baumgartner was the instrument of another surprise for me. I had an appointment with him one afternoon; the object of my visit was quickly dealt with. But Wilfrid retained me in his office, chatting about one thing or another, apparently in no hurry to see me go. Night had fallen by the time I left him. Since it was so late, I drove directly to Ferrières. The château was dark and deserted; I was told that Marie-Hélène wished me to wait for her in the Tapestry Room. I suddenly remembered that it was my birthday and wondered if some conspiracy might be afoot – but what? I was led, still in darkness, into the large dining room. All of a sudden the lights were turned on and one hundred guests rose to shout 'Happy Birthday' – Baumgartner among them! He had been Marie-Hélène's accomplice, purposely delaying me in Paris long enough to make sure I'd be the last to arrive.

The Mauritanian venture christened MIFERMA was an impressive achievement. A 400-mile-long railway had to be built across the desert from the Nouadhibou Peninsula to the mine. Each train was two miles long, composed of 20-ton freight cars drawn by two locomotives run by two crews which relayed each other, eating and sleeping as they rolled along. They travelled at eight miles an hour and maintained permanent radio contact with the termini at both ends in order to be able to summon air assistance in case of mishap. Since our Board meetings were often held in Mauritania, I frequently had the occasion to go there: a very pleasant trip when the weather was good; much less so when a sandstorm was blowing!

Financially, MIFERMA was typical of many ventures in the developing

countries. The iron ore was very high-grade; unfortunately, its world price collapsed even before the mine went into production. In 1974, when the huge loans had been reimbursed and dividends were about to be paid, the company was nationalized. Compensation was offered, but the return on investment over the period of time involved was insignificant. It is this sort of experience that has caused so many capitalists to lose their zest for investing in the Third World countries.

The climax of the French economic adventure in Africa was the discovery of oil in the Sahara desert. It set off a veritable Black Gold Rush. The first well to be exploited was located at Hassi-Messaoud and owned by the Compagnie Française des Pétroles. Marie-Hélène, Georges Pompidou and I were among the first to visit it – on one of the first flights of the Caravelle.

All of the French investment banks, including our own, issued special funds in order to finance the numerous projects that followed the earlier successful explorations. All these investment trusts included in their titles the letters REP (Research, Exploitation, Petrol): the first was FINAREP of the Banque de Paris; soon there was COFIREP in which we were associated with the Worms Bank, and many others. As new oil discoveries were made in the Sahara, the REPs set off a boom on the stock-market. People were lining up to subscribe to new issues; COFIREP, in two years, hit a peak of seven times its issuing price. In 1957, again in association with Worms, we created FRANCAREP. Too speculative for the general public, Georges Pompidou and I placed all the shares, by telephone, with private investors.

The Algerian Independence in 1962 put an end to this sensational but short-lived boom. Politically inevitable, undoubtedly desirable from the humanitarian point of view, it nevertheless deprived France of a major source of energy and wiped out the anticipated profits of French investors, since their property was expropriated by the new government. Only FRANCAREP survived: thanks to its investments in North Sea oil, in West Africa and Italy, as well as in Florida phosphates, it is still a prosperous enterprise.

During the oil rush era, Rothschild Frères issued a total of seven different funds for oil and raw materials. The nationalization of all natural resources eventually divested these companies of their original purpose. At the same time, a change of legislation harmonized the tax status of holding companies (such as the Compagnie du Nord) with that of investment trusts (such as S.I. Nord). The best policy in these new conditions was to do away with a diversity that had lost its meaning. Over a period of several years, we therefore gradually merged them all into the Compagnie du Nord, in order to make the best possible use of these assets.

As a result, the assets of the Compagnie du Nord rose from 150 million francs in 1945 to 800 million in 1968 (the latter figure being the equivalent of 2.4 billion 1979 francs). The Compagnie du Nord was now worth half as much as PARIBAS, and 60 per cent as much as Suez – a remarkable and very satisfying growth.

It would, I fear, be tedious to go into the list of investments controlled by the Compagnie du Nord and to relate the various case histories, interesting as they are. But the main subject of this book is not business and finance! Suffice it to say that we became involved in a variety of different fields, including oil, shipping, cold storage, construction, hotels . . . The most important and most glamorous was the nonferrous corporation IMETAL, of which more later.

Looking back from the viewpoint of the mid-sixties, the postwar development of the rue Laffitte was undeniably impressive. Progress had been made in the commercial banking department, mostly due to our financial activity which had increased out of all proportion the assets and funds that were entrusted to our management.

Between 1947 and 1955, deposits in the bank showed no real growth; they simply caught up with the 1950 devaluation and amounted to between 150 and 200 million 1979 francs. By the end of 1957, they had increased to 800 million of the same francs. But ten years later, in 1967, they hardly reached the billion mark. While the Compagnie du Nord and its affiliates continued to grow, the bank seemed to stagnate; the slight increase in deposits during the exceptionally prosperous decade of 1957–67 was ample proof of that. Our financial creativity generated profits only inasmuch as it fed the commercial banking sector. New issues and mergers had considerably augmented the volume of our investments, but as far as we were concerned, profits derived only from our bank deposits.

Since our name with its quasi-mythical celebrity possessed considerable commercial value, it was clear that our potential was being underexploited. The obvious conclusion: we should concentrate on what was most rewarding – commercial banking. This involved converting the partnership into a larger corporation, opening branch offices in Paris and in other major cities. As we developed the analysis further, other factors emerged, principally the question of size. Below a certain level, a bank is squeezed out by its competitors in a field where volume and power are to a certain extent associated. The more I observed the economic evolution in the western world, the more evident it became that most businesses tended to grow and often to merge in order to create larger and larger units. Without attempting an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon, suffice it to say that it is not due simply to the pride of gigantic size and power, but

rather to the practical fact of getting a better return on capital investment. Good management nowadays requires a sophisticated organization, the cost of which must be spread over the largest possible volume of business. From the human point of view as well, a self-confident, successful management team hates to feel underemployed, but rather seeks to enlarge its scope of action.

Writing these lines fifteen years later I can only add that this trend has continued to develop considerably in the United States, spreading throughout the financial sector, where a number of institutions have either merged or been acquired by commercial conglomerates with assets amounting to billions of dollars. I feel obliged to mention the outstanding exception to the rule, which I have followed closely: Lazard Frères in Paris and New York, which have succeeded in attracting and renewing an unusually large team of financially creative talent. Both firms are prosperous, with no increase in size, only in profits. I've always admired their achievement, without ever seeing how to emulate it!

For years in France I tried to find associates endowed with that very special talent of being 'money-makers'. I've come across sound managers, respectable and trustworthy; but none of them belonged to that rare species which 'creates profits'. Perhaps if I had circulated more, I might have had the opportunity to meet the exceptional individuals I was seeking. Now in 1984, as I am in New York for a while, I observe with pride and joy the success of our family firm here in attracting exactly the sort of management personnel I dreamed of in those bygone days.

To return to the rue Laffitte: the land on which our old building stood was also underemployed. It was easy to see that we could replace 4,000 square metres of inefficiently exploited real estate by 16,000 square metres of modern, functional office space. Determined to live up to our reputation for good taste, we finally selected, after many consultations, the plan proposed by the American firm of Harrison and Abramowitz, in collaboration with the French architect Pierre Dufau. This property development scheme was of course linked with our banking projects, as one had to house the other, and both were the result of our dynamic planning.

At this stage, one might have drawn diametrically opposed conclusions from the same analysis. For example, if we had been willing to give up the Compagnie du Nord, the companies it controlled, the men we had chosen to run them, the public who had bought our shares, trusting in our management and towards whom we felt responsible . . . we could have conceived of another policy: contenting ourselves with our small, private bank; finding a buyer for the publicly listed group, and concentrating on the management of our own assets. This more selfish course would have

been quite the opposite of embarking on the long-term growth of an institution which we managed, but of which we'd be only part-owners.

By selling the Compagnie du Nord, discarding its complex existing structure – including the mining group, which was expanding fast – we could have realized a handsome personal profit and would have been free to invest it anywhere we wished. Likewise, the development of our real estate on the rue Laffitte could have been turned into a highly lucrative operation if we had been willing to sell or rent it, instead of using the increased capacity to house our growing enterprise.

I must say that we never even considered the selfish alternative: we identified ourselves with the business. For all of us, it went without saying that in a France in full economic expansion, the Rothschilds should maintain their traditional role in the vanguard, together with the loyal associates we had recruited, whose problems and responsibilities we shared. All the companies of our group bore the hallmark of Rothschild and were appraised as such. Moreover, tens of thousands of shareholders in the Compagnie du Nord considered themselves our partners, for better or for worse.

The basic choice we faced was either to retire timidly, or to maintain our expansion by the same means that had been successful until then: in association with the public. Just as one ought to live as if one will live forever, one should manage corporate interests as if they were eternal. Businesses tend to acquire an identity of their own. They can be run successfully only according to their specific interest and their ultimate purpose, which their managers must take into account at the same time that they try to imprint their own personalities on them.

We had no mental reservations in making our fundamental, final decision: with pardonable vanity, we decided to announce the news during the 150th Anniversary year of the founding of the Paris branch of Rothschild Frères, then a European firm. We were now in 1967, and I was to make the announcement during a press conference held in the large partners' room.

The event took place in May. I was surrounded by my cousins, our wives and sons, our senior associates. My cousin Edmond, who runs his own businesses, was present in a gesture of solidarity and encouragement. All the press turned out. To underline the solemnity of the occasion, it was arranged for me to make my entrance after everyone else had been seated, like an actor after the curtain goes up. I was composed – but I could feel the adrenalin flowing! While my speech had been carefully prepared, I tried to give the impression of speaking spontaneously, rather than reading from a script. I explained what the Compagnie du Nord was, what were its assets, what we had done with it, and above all what we intended to do as of

1 January 1968. From that moment, the bank, henceforth a corporation, would change its name to Banque Rothschild; its capital would be increased by an infusion of capital from the Compagnie du Nord amounting to 70 per cent of the shares; I was to be the Chairman of the Board of the new firm, which would concentrate its activities in the areas deemed most promising by our market research. I also announced the project to tear down our old building and construct modern, aesthetic, attractively decorated offices in its place. This came as a complete surprise to the audience, as there had been no leak of our plans. The news was very well received; we were given wide press coverage – and a lot of free publicity!

The new building, 21 rue Laffitte, was inaugurated at Easter 1970. One can imagine the amount of work; research, planning, recruiting, that had been done before then . . . including the acquisition of two small banks. The building was set at right-angles to the street; a series of terraces on either side broke the monotony of the solid frontage. Great care was taken in the decoration of the offices as well as of the public rooms, with an eye to aesthetics as well as comfort. An attractive cafeteria in the basement was artfully decorated in order to eliminate any possible feeling of claustrophobia. Well in evidence was the symbol we adopted: the sheaf of five arrows, which symbolizes in the family crest the Five Gentlemen of Frankfurt.

Technically of course, the new Banque Rothschild had started in 1968. Its growth fulfilled our expectations: by the end of 1980, deposits amounted to over 3.4 billion francs, and the firm ranked among the top fifteen French commercial banks. There were twelve branches in Paris and eight in other major cities. We employed 1,350 people. The expansion was not, however, without its setbacks and disappointments. It wasn't easy to start a commercial bank in competition with old, solidly established institutions. Moreover, the unforeseen reversal of the economy led to the worst depression in forty years: possibly as bad as that of 1929, certainly longer-lasting. During the first few years, the management I'd appointed was more eager to develop new business than it was capable of controlling the increasing overheads and installing necessary control systems. The more dynamic a newcomer is, the harder he is hit by a depression. Furthermore, the French system of credit control by the government since 1972 was particularly inhibiting, because it froze existing positions, whereas we had a larger equity base than most, which should have given us more opportunities. But such is often the case in France.

Nevertheless, nothing could compromise the solidity of our group, whose reserves were very large, even when evaluated as conservatively as they

were. However, stricter management methods were indispensable if we were to establish a satisfactory profit margin. Several changes of top management had to be made. But it was only the last team to be brought in – consisting of my son David and my nephew Nathaniel – who proved up to the mark and who recruited a good staff. In the meantime, my nephew Eric was succeeding brilliantly in reorganizing SAGA, one of our affiliated companies that had been lagging behind. Given time, this younger generation of Rothschilds would certainly have seen their work crowned with success, and I will always deeply regret that the nationalization of our bank deprived them of their just rewards for such excellent efforts.

The Compagnie du Nord, as I've said, owned 70 per cent of the Rothschild Bank, and in 1978 we decided to merge the two. It would mean an economy of overheads, a more favourable tax structure, more efficient banking and, after the economic recovery, it would have permitted greater expansion.

This merger between an industrial holding and the bank which was its subsidiary has been criticized in certain quarters as being politically unwise. However, neither the Banque de Paris nor Suez, which had the same structure, carried out a similar merger – which did not prevent both groups from being nationalized too. Even if one supposes that in our case only the bank would have been nationalized, I cannot see how this would have been of benefit to us: our House, our name, our historical identity, would still have been taken from us. We would have been left with a motley group of industrial interests of which the most important – IMETAL – was to suffer the worst possible effects of the slump. In short, we would have been robbed of the principal and left with the accessories. Even if we'd kept the banking partnership in its original form, our deposits would still have exceeded the limit which we had virtually reached in 1968, and beyond which nationalization was mandatory. So we still would have suffered the same fate.

Be that as it may, our final consolidation in a single corporate entity was the result of a lengthy process that began in 1945 and gradually led to the merger of all the components in one major unit. It demonstrated more than anything else the fact that we had entered a new era: the family name was listed on the French Stock Exchange for the first time (and I can now say, the last). But in order to judge fairly the full potential of the reorganization of the means at our disposal, we needed another five or ten years.

In 1975, new legislation obliged all corporations to include in their by-laws a compulsory retirement age for their Directors and Presidents. We

decided on the age of seventy.

When I reached that milestone, I naturally had to abide by the rule – which, in fact, conforms with my personal philosophy. First of all, I think it unfair to stand in the way of the rising younger generation; secondly, beyond a certain age one may be wise, but one is seldom an innovator; moreover, nobody is able to evaluate the decline of his own mental faculties, because it is precisely the faculty of judging oneself that is the first to go!

I like to think I have a sense of fair play. In any case, I relinquished my responsibilities without a moment's hesitation, despite my inner regrets; and afterwards, I refrained from back-seat driving, from harassing my successors in any way. I listened gratefully to the reports they brought me and gave my advice when it was sought; but I never tried to impose my own views. While this behaviour may seem excessively stoical, I thus maintained excellent relations with my successors; in fact, we never had any difference of opinion.

Although one never really knows what one's associates think of one deep down, I believe I was easy to work with, even though I have the reputation for being authoritative. Still, I've always generously delegated responsibility and authority to others; I've always listened to contradictions and suggestions with an open mind. My very demanding sense of responsibility – one of my dominating characteristics – tends to make me accept all the blame for errors instead of blaming others. Since I'm fortunate enough to be neither hesitant nor indecisive, I've always made a point of consulting my partners and associates, putting our heads together whenever a major decision has to be made. This is not to say that I've always been right! While I have invariably given precedence to my work over amusement and frivolity, I've certainly erred more by excessive indulgence towards others than by egocentric bossiness.

When I retired from the front line, I had the impression that the family team to which I handed over the ball would within a few years benefit from the homogenous, efficient structure we'd set up, as well as from their own innovative management. Fate decided otherwise. Only three years later, the firm with all of its holdings, including the mining companies, was nationalized – and the Rothschilds were thrown out.

CHAPTER

12

The Grit Beneath the Smile

Between his bushy, stubborn eyebrows and the cigarette dangling from his mouth, a fleeting half-smile; and in the depth of his eyes a glint of irony mingled with tenderness . . .

Such is the image of Georges Pompidou that I've cherished for almost thirty years. He was my friend, a friend of Marie-Hélène, a friend of our friends.

That's all I'd really like to say.

However . . . Pompidou and Rothschild. It's an old story, to which some people refer with an insinuating smile. And if I were to remain silent, I'd hear the malicious gossips snicker: 'You see? There was certainly something to hide . . . '

Talking about a friend is easy enough: one wants to praise his merits, excuse his faults. But writing about a friend is a perilous project: if one draws a portrait from one's heart, one could be boring; if one tries to describe the little daily complicities that draw together two human beings, there's the risk of sounding insignificant. And if destiny has happened to raise that friend whose memory one wishes to recall to the rank of Head of State, an equally perilous navigation lies ahead: on the one hand, there's the avid throng expecting anecdotes, since only the 'inside story' of history intrigues them; on the other hand, the battalions of political opponents, always on the lookout for a flaw behind the official portrait, hoping that some last-minute revelation will satisfy their jealous and vindictive hopes.

At the risk of disappointing both, I'll write about the man whom destiny placed in my path, and who in time became my friend. About his personality, which asserted itself before my eyes; about the evolution that leads upstanding men, once they've determined their route, to advance with an ever firmer step. I'll try to show how the statesman was an extension of the human being; how, behind his public deeds and gestures, I could always recognize the same motivations that underlay his daily behaviour – also the way he died, as he had lived.

On several occasions in 1953, René Fillon drew my attention to a man he'd met in the political circles he frequented at the time. He was full of praise for this civil servant of rather modest rank (Deputy Commissioner for Tourism). Fillon nagged me relentlessly, trying to convince me that this man would make a good recruit for us. A former professor turned civil servant, he seemed to dislike working for the government; he thought responsibility was so dispersed that it was finally impossible to bring a project to completion. Having made up his mind to enter the private sector, where he was convinced he'd be happier, he was waiting for a good opportunity.

Since I had no job to offer, I was vaguely evasive each time the subject came up, until the day René Fillon brought Georges Pompidou to meet me. 'You simply cannot refuse him', he insisted.

Our meeting was cordial. I liked the man; he struck me as being modest but determined. His physical appearance then was quite different from the picture of their President as the French remember him: an unaffected and reassuring mien, a certain stoutness which he assumed without self-consciousness. At that time, although he wasn't exactly slender, there was a sharpness, a keenness in Pompidou's features that was almost strange.

One of the sectors of our group happened to be causing me concern just then: Transocean, which we had created after the war to engage in import-export transactions without resorting to foreign currency payments (as I've described earlier). The risks we were taking seemed to me out of all proportion to the results, and I needed a man to run it who had his feet on the ground. Pompidou must have given me that impression, because I asked him to make a study of the business and propose solutions to me, without neglecting to warn him of the difficulties involved. He accepted unhesitatingly; in fact, the challenge seemed to amuse him.

Our personal contact was infrequent at first. The Transocean offices weren't in the rue Laffitte, and we met only once a week. He was reserved by nature, and I am not very outgoing myself. Our relationship might be described as courteous, but little more.

It took the chance event of a business trip to Africa (in connection with the development of SAGA, our maritime sector) for friendship to develop. I invited Georges Pompidou to accompany me. Guided by a former French colonialist, Michel Pasteau, the President of the company, we spent fifteen days together, visiting West and Equitorial Africa, in particular Liberia, Guinea and Senegal. There were only the three of us; I had plenty of time to get to know the man, the vast extent of his culture, his multi-faceted personality, his curiosity and that mixture of reserve and human warmth that drew me to him.

His suggestions concerning Transocean struck me as constructive. I named him General Manager of the business. He succeeded in salvaging it. Such an achievement by a person who had been able so rapidly to assimilate financial and commercial techniques previously unknown to him, did not fail to impress me.

A short while later, René Fillon, who was already afflicted with a mild political virus – he was Treasurer of the RPF (the Gaullist party) and member of the Economic and Social Council – suddenly developed a raging case of it. Possibly afraid of becoming bogged down in the business world when his background had prepared him for other spheres of activity, he was toying with the idea of running for Senator of the Overseas French. He therefore asked to be released from his job with us, to which I naturally agreed. (I don't remember if there was then any legal incompatability between a political mandate and a financial career; a person close to the political scene did not remain in a bank simply because 'it wasn't done'.)

I'd just engaged Gérard Froment-Meurice as Banking Manager, in charge of the commercial sector. He was one of the principal associates of my old wartime friend, Pierre Chevrier, the General Manager of the nationalized BNP bank, and he too preferred to work in a private enterprise. It remained for me to find a replacement for René Fillon to supervise it all – and especially the financial sector, in which imagination is of primordial importance.

I didn't hesitate for long. Pompidou may not have been reared in the seraglio, but he'd certainly proved his adaptability. Moreover, the conception of business management as a science did not exist in France at that time – probably not even in America as yet. Apart from certain highly technical sectors, one preferred to entrust the management of business to men with a broad background of general culture, capable of adapting to any situation.

And so I made the leap, trusting my intuition – as one takes the risk of a finesse in bridge. All of a sudden, Pompidou thus found himself skyrocketed from a position which was, after all, rather secondary, to the highest responsibilities of the rue Laffitte. I named him Manager. (This was because Messieurs de Rothschild Frères was then a partnership, which excluded the title of President since, according to French by-laws, all partners are chief executives.)

We worked together in perfect harmony, exchanging our ideas every day, agreeing on options to be taken. We soon reached the point where our reactions and ideas were alike. I think we made a good team. I appreciated Georges's superior intelligence, the kind that is able to deal with concrete matters, his sound common sense, his seriousness, his

ability to direct and supervise, his innate authority to which his staff responded from the very start.

I was astonished by the self-confidence he showed at once. He never seemed uneasy in the leading role he had to play in all circumstances. He confided to me later that the need to assert his authority over people older, sometimes even more competent than himself, had never been a problem for him. He undoubtedly possessed that rare gift which combines two normally antagonistic qualities: keen awareness of the fact that his intelligence and culture allowed him to master any subject, and modesty, due to which he never made a pretence of knowing what he didn't know. He never hesitated to make decisions, nor was he reticent about asking questions. His self-confidence, both modest and full of awareness, was certainly one of his fundamental characteristics, long before it became the foundation of his success.

Pompidou's rapid ascension therefore created no human relations problems at the rue Laffitte. With Froment-Meurice, for example, there was never any friction or rivalry.

I've already described the development of the bank during this period. I cannot really say that Pompidou's management influenced our business curve, which was already on the upswing; but it's undeniable that his direction gave our group a new capital of confidence and solidity – also another dimension. Unlike most highly-placed civil servants who enter private business, he didn't bring us a string of contacts with important officials or with members of ministerial staffs. Pompidou already maintained relations of a more political nature, but he kept them to himself, never trying to draw me into these friendships, probably due to his sense of discretion.

What would the bank have become if he'd stayed on? A real question! Would his prudence, his doubts, have led him to oppose my idea of transforming Rothschild Frères into the Banque Rothschild, a corporation? Would he have encouraged my desire to develop the commercial banking sector? Who can say . . .

It may seem perfectly natural for two associates who agree on all essential principles and who respect each other, to become friends, then intimate.

In my case, however, our circle of close friends and the business community had always been two worlds apart. Marie-Hélène chooses her friends according to her heart; with her love of fantasy, her generosity, she is more attracted towards artistic spheres. My natural tendency to separate my private and professional lives was therefore reinforced by my marriage; I'd acquired the habit of refusing to impose on my family the business dinners that generally bore them to tears. One shoot a year at Ferrières, that was all.

And it was during one of those rare 'business shoots' that Marie-Hélène discovered Georges Pompidou.

She immediately detected the amazing richness of the human being behind the man who arrived for his first weekend at Ferrières: a bit awkward, reserved to the point of shyness, moreover a businessman (*a priori* suspect); uncommunicative (some people might have assumed that he was boring); a down-to-earth man (by definition provincial). Modesty and reserve are attributes that seldom lead to success in society, but Marie-Hélène is particularly sensitive to these qualities, and she understood at once that in Georges Pompidou's complex personality they accompanied, without eclipsing, all the other qualities that made him an exceptional human being. He and his wife Claude soon joined the circle of our most intimate friends.

Before 1958, when General de Gaulle returned to power, we saw a lot of them. One weekend at Ferrières led to another, and they soon came almost every week. A few days together in Deauville were followed by a winter sports holiday, then a trip to the United States. We became inseparable.

At Ferrières, everyone adored him. He was the silent man to whom everyone listened; the newcomer, viewed at first askance, now inspired confidence and confidences. Every weekend a circle of admirers awaited his arrival like that of some renowned professor. He filled the role magnificently. Not that he was prone to pontificate or to lecture eruditely. On the contrary, he was quite the opposite of those fearsome pedants who show off their recently acquired culture at every turn of the phrase (Beware of Fresh Culture!), like a make-up base covers the underlying pallor. If I may be permitted a culinary metaphor: instead of spreading his butter on any fashionable biscuit, as do so many, he added his pinch of salt only to those dishes that inspired him – and which we devoured with relish. Those were priceless moments of intelligence and gaiety.

He was a fascinating man. Unlike most French businessmen or prominent politicians, he never tried to show off his brilliance. Unlike those semi-professional entertainers who savour during a dinner party the witty remarks they've cooked up in advance, he hated laughter at the expense of others. And yet, how brilliant and witty he was! But since he was also reserved by nature and discreet, he waited to be sought out, as if he made whatever ideas he might have available to others for their own use. He didn't try to impose his views, he didn't like to lecture nor to flaunt his superiority. He wasn't a crusader, although he was undeniably a man of conviction: his determination was total and unyielding. Without ever disavowing his ideas, he was also open to reasonable argument, his eye and

ear continually alert. While he always seemed willing to modify his own opinions, in the end it was always he who won others over to his side.

His down-to-earth common sense has often been mentioned. It was in reality more a feminine kind of intuition, in the guise of natural perspicacity. In any case, he certainly elevated plain good sense to the supreme height of art.

Although he was definitely an intellectual, he instinctively saw things from a practical point of view. With a classic education and no experience in the field of economics, he was immediately able to find the simplest means of resolving the most complex financial problems.

Stable, level-headed, relentlessly persevering in whatever task he undertook, the two pillars of his action were logic and willpower.

'Tranquil Strength' – the caption under François Mitterand's picture during his presidential campaign – would have been an accurate description of Pompidou, rather than an empty political slogan.

Georges Pompidou was not a 'character' in the sense of a character in a play or novel, which implies acting a role. He certainly had the wily side of a peasant whom life has taught to be wary. But he was first and foremost a man of truth, incapable of cunning or pretence. When he was struck by sorrow, it was infinitely moving to guess the hurt in the depths of that strong and stolid man. Nothing gave one a greater feeling of helplessness than to see him suddenly silent, like a wounded animal, facing his ordeal with stoicism, trying to let no hint of it appear. Only his eyes, more sombre than usual, betrayed his inner grief.

He knew how to laugh, but preferred to smile. He enjoyed jokes, but preferred the kind of humour, rare in France, that is the result of observing life from a certain distance. Although sceptical of human nature, harbouring no illusions as to its limitations and mediocrity, he was nevertheless incapable of scorn. Everyone, in fact, has lauded his benevolence, so evident was it, even to his enemies.

Obstinate but patient, headstrong but adaptable, stubborn but not inflexible: these traits of his are well known. However, even more than the 'man of confidence' as he's so often been described, he was a man who inspired confidence, and who gave it to others.

As for his alleged thirst for power, his pronounced taste for leadership, I'll comment on it when dealing with his political career. In the business field, while he enjoyed power, it was due to his desire to prove the results of his analyses. During the years we worked together, I had the impression that he preferred to collaborate rather than to dominate.

He has sometimes been criticized for his rather developed penchant for authoritativeness. The reason for it, so it seems to me, is simple: he hated

to have the wool pulled over his eyes – in which case, it is true, he could be peremptory and high-handed.

Anyone who observed him closely could see that he was far more complex than he at first appeared to be. Maggie van Zuylen, famous for her epigrams, one day described him with wit and perspicacity: 'One eye a vicar's, the other a rascal's!'

In fact, the intricacy of his personality was perhaps explained by a secret wish to reconcile opposites. As in his physical appearance, round and square at the same time, which harboured exceptional sensitivity, he combined such brother enemies as humour and gravity, subtlety and straightforwardness, wit and sobriety, rigour and frivolity, severity and tenderness – and, as will be seen, the vulnerable heart of a man who could be mortally wounded by ingratitude and calumny.

While he had an open mind, he still preferred to rely on his own uncompromising intellectual discipline rather than on outside opinions. He was the most adult, most responsible man that I have ever known: more than anything, he despised the slightest display of puerility.

He preferred the company of women to that of people who were too solemn. Warm, kindly, generous, he kept secret his many, frequent good deeds. When he liked someone, he also tried to conceal his feelings behind a sardonic, teasing smile, as if from sentimental vanity. Though moral, he wasn't moralistic. He tried to dissimulate his virtue behind sometimes sarcastic remarks, as if to dispel any trace of puritanism.

This poet and philosopher could move smoothly from the most serious discussions to the most frivolous and futile subjects: he could wax enthusiastic over new acquaintances as well as the latest fashions; he followed with interest the important art auctions, but also the latest social gossip. He read all the new books, but for nothing in the world would he have missed an international rugby match. He was a connoisseur of modern art, but could just as knowledgeably discuss the latest models at the Motor Show.

Certain domains, however, were 'Private Property, No Trespassing!' Nothing could induce him to lower the barrier. For example, psychoanalysis. He believed the only way to surmount problems was through willpower; the rest – the subconscious – would automatically follow. To his mind, analysis was for people who indulged in listening to themselves; manual activity, physical exercise, seemed to him more effective therapy than the passive process of psychoanalysis.

He loved life, but perhaps he loved the game of life even more. He played it for pleasure, but he also played to win. One only had to see him place a counter on the roulette wheel and nearly die of anguish as the ball rolled around, as if his last cent was at stake! At bridge (since he seldom

had time for it he was only an average player), he concentrated intently on every card and couldn't forgive himself the slightest error or moment of inattention.

He was a go-getter, a winner. However, once victory had been achieved, there appeared that little smile which seemed to say: 'So what!', accompanied by a twinkle in his eye to show that he wasn't taken in by the insignificance of it all.

In the Visitor's Book at Ferrières, some of our friends used to enjoy filling in Marcel Proust's famous questionnaire; Georges Pompidou did so with good grace in 1959. His replies reveal his simplicity and lack of affectation. No literary effects, no showing off, no attempt at brilliance. Just the quality and depth of the man he was:

What is your favourite virtue?
– Modesty
What is the quality you prefer in a man?
– Nobility
What is the quality you prefer in a woman?
– Grace
What are your favourite activities?
– Reading, music
What is your dominant characteristic?
– Obstinacy
What is your idea of happiness?
– At the fireside, in the evening, beside a loved one
What is your idea of unhappiness?
– An aged bachelor
What is your favourite colour, your favourite flower?
– Red. The rose
If not yourself, who would you like to be?
– An artist or writer
Where would you most like to live?
– In Paris or in Italy
Who are your favourite authors?
– Proust, Dostoevsky
Who are your favourite poets?
– Racine, Baudelaire, Shakespeare
Who are your favourite painters and composers?
– da Vinci, Vermeer, Cézanne. Mozart, Beethoven
Who are your favourite heroes in real life?
– de Gaulle
Who are your favourite heroines in real life?
– None
Who is your favourite hero in fiction?
– Fabrice del Dongo
Who are your favourite heroines in fiction?

– Anna Karenina
What are your favourite foods and drinks?
– Cabbage soup, foie gras and bordeaux
What are your favourite names?
– Alain, Anne
What do you consider the greatest fault?
– Masculine stupidity
What characters in history do you most dislike?
– the Puritans
What is your present mood?
– Luxury, tranquillity and sheer pleasure
What is your motto?
– None

Well-balanced and down-to-earth, a man of culture and of action, of common sense and intuition, pragmatic and prudent, endowed with courage, willpower, patience . . . I couldn't see what qualities were lacking to qualify Georges Pompidou for the most pre-eminent roles. I could see at once he was a born leader.

As things turned out, the French did indeed recognize him one day as the personification of the nation (and later recognized how much the nation owed to him). Nevertheless, politics may have led Pompidou into an arena for which he was insufficiently armed.

Along with my cousins and the executives of the bank, I was perfectly aware of his interest in politics – as well as of the interest that politics, in the person of General de Gaulle, was beginning to take in him. But his connection with the General (I almost wrote 'his secret liaison') was so discreet, that it seemed to belong to the domain of Georges's private life. Of course, we all knew he'd been a member of de Gaulle's staff at the time of the Liberation; I also knew that de Gaulle (who was then living in retirement at Colombey-les-Deux-Eglises) consulted him about everything, and that he was, unknown to the public, one of the trusted advisers of 'the hermit of Colombey'.

De Gaulle asked Pompidou to negotiate the contract for his memoirs with his publisher. (Georges once showed me the watch he was given in gratitude for his efforts, with the historic signature engraved on the back.) He also asked him to be Treasurer of the Anne de Gaulle Foundation, established in memory of de Gaulle's handicapped daughter. Obviously, these were two proofs of the greatest confidence, since both were related to de Gaulle's most intimate memories.

My relationship with Georges grew steadily closer. I now knew that de Gaulle considered him practically a member of the family; that he frequently invited the Pompidous to Colombey; that Georges had become

a sort of civilian aide-de-camp or, as the English would say, head of his 'shadow cabinet'.

Of course, I was always curious to hear Georges talk about the General, to learn what he thought of the political evolution in France. However, without concealing his close relationship, Pompidou remained discreet. He was aware of my own ideas and never attempted to influence or convince me in any way. He simply asserted as self-evident that not only was de Gaulle a giant of history, but also a genius: he alone had the gift of visualizing the future. Georges's opinion was set, his admiration evident. Oddly enough, he never tried to convert me, nor even to arrange a meeting between the General and myself. In his eyes, de Gaulle was the only man who could save the nation again, but the nation, alas, refused to listen to him. He was convinced (and often told me so) that de Gaulle's retirement was permanent; that circumstances would never permit his return to power. At that time, who could have believed otherwise?

We very seldom discussed internal politics; the sad spectacle of Parliament's return to a state of paralysis had made me lose all interest in public affairs. But I enjoyed talking to Georges about what was close to my heart: Europe, the European Defence Community, our relations with the Americans and British and, when the Treaty of Rome was finally signed, the Common Market. As a partisan of some system of European alliance, I held different views from his; it was a point on which we clashed quite often. I think I can say without conceit that an evolution gradually took place in Georges's mind, which would eventually surprise even me. There will be further proof of it in a moment.

Then it was 13 May 1958. The Algerian rebellion. A period of indecision which rapidly led to the feeling that only de Gaulle could restore the authority which was disintegrating every day. As for the rumoured secret negotiations before and afterwards – the famous 'Thirteen Conspiracies of the Thirteenth of May' – Pompidou never mentioned the subject to me. When he didn't wish to reveal a secret, he didn't reveal it. Indeed, he went further: he didn't even reveal the fact that he knew a secret which he didn't wish to reveal!

I personally believe that the notion of a conspiracy concocted long in advance is just another myth of our political history which, like a sea serpent when the sea is calm, rises to the surface for a while, only to disappear again.

In any case, one morning during that month of May, Pompidou announced that he was going to spend the day at Colombey. That same evening, he came to see me at the bank and to my great surprise told me that he was relieved and pleased by the change in de Gaulle's attitude: he

no longer had any intention of disputing France's entry into the Common Market. I was even more surprised than he! Pompidou himself had become 'European' as a result of his experience in working at the rue Laffitte! He even confided to me on the same occasion that the question which preoccupied him most in going to Colombey that day was how to broach the subject of Europe to the General, who, he feared, still had such a closed mind about it.

When Pompidou returned to the bank after six months as de Gaulle's chief of staff, we made a brief trip to the United States – Claude, Marie-Hélène, Georges and I – during the course of which I could see how much Pompidou appreciated the Americans. While it's true that afterwards, as head of state, he continued his predecessor's policy of aloofness and reserve towards the United States, this was in no way due to any personal antipathy, but to a political conviction: the international role of France required her to remain independent of American leadership and free from engagement in any geopolitical bloc. During his public life, he thus adopted an increasingly pro-British policy – moreover, it was during his Presidency that Britain joined the Common Market.

Later during that same month of May, Pompidou walked into my office to confirm the rumour everyone was speculating about: General de Gaulle had agreed to return to power. At the same time, he announced that he himself had accepted the post of chief of staff.

Over lunch together, he told me he wasn't at all interested in a political career, but simply wished to participate in drawing up the new Constitution, after which he intended to return to private business.

I said: 'Even if you want to come back – and God knows I hope you will – the General will never let you go.'

He replied in a flash: 'I am in no way equal to General de Gaulle . . . except in one thing: I'm just as stubborn!'

And so I believed he might return to the bank, and made no effort to find a replacement for him in the meantime.

A few months later he was, in fact, back. France had a new government, a new Constitution, a new Republic (the Fifth), of which General de Gaulle was President. And Georges considered his political role finished.

From then on, Pompidou tried to avoid becoming too involved in the political game, and especially to avoid playing a prominent part in it. He preferred the more discreet role of 'King's Counsellor'. I knew he sometimes saw various members of the government. From what he told me, I easily imagined him offering his advice as elder statesman, making ironic comments on the shortcomings or temperamental outbursts of one

person or another. He seemed to be the bearer of the peace pipe to the circle of medicine men surrounding the Indian Chief; the mediator, summoned by a common accord, to hand down his calm judgements. He used to see de Gaulle at least once a week, generally in the evening – when, as he sometimes confided to me, he usually tried to appease the General's irritation with one person or another.

Between 1958 and 1962, Pompidou devoted all his energies to the bank. He seemed neither unhappy nor frustrated to have descended from the heights of international politics to the level of practical problems. He readjusted smoothly to the ordinary (if not exactly easy) work of a 'small firm'. It seemed only natural for me to resign from the presidency of the Société d'Investissements du Nord and turn the job over to him.

I still feared that his assiduous activity with de Gaulle, modest as it might appear to be, would one day lead him to make the big leap back onto the political scene. More precisely, I was convinced that even if Georges denied any such intention ('I'll find some way to get out of it', he told me), de Gaulle was bound to need him soon. It was always from the General that messages came for Georges at the bank.

And during a private meeting one evening, de Gaulle cornered him, leaving him no opportunity to get out of it.

The day after Pompidou's appointment as Prime Minister, he and Claude came to dinner. He announced his departure from the bank. Marie-Hélène was confined to bed, and we dined in her room. During the conversation, she remarked: 'I don't know why, but I have a foreboding that this is the last time we'll be together this way.' Georges didn't say anything, but I could spot a tear in his eye. As for Claude, she was thoroughly upset by the thought of the life that lay before her.

There was a note of defiance in de Gaulle's promotion of a man who'd never been 'in politics', never served in Parliament or as a minister, to the number one position in his government. But that was the General's style. Already, Georges's role of secret negotiator during the undercover preliminaries to the Evian agreement (which led to the end of the war in Algeria and its independence), had confirmed my premonition: entrusting to a man inexperienced in diplomacy such an important mission concerning an affair which menaced the very unity of the nation, was proof of the total confidence de Gaulle had in him. (It may also have been proof of his distrust of professional politicians, too busy redesigning the map of the world to remember to keep their feet on the ground.)

The position Georges Pompidou had occupied at the rue Laffitte was empty now; I didn't even attempt to seek a replacement, knowing I could never find his equal. He was about to be named President of Pennaroya; I decided to assume personally all of his former functions. I felt by then

sufficiently experienced and confident; my staff were sufficiently broken in. Besides, it was the start of a period of expansion, creation and development for us as well as for the entire French economy. Already launched in orbit, we were virtually swept along in the general current.

Pompidou's immediate move from the rue Laffitte to the Hôtel Matignon (the headquarters and official residence of the Prime Minister), inspired cynical and amusing comments from the media, as one can imagine: The *Canard Enchaîné* caused a stir by framing his title between the same initials on either side: R.F., with the caption on the left 'République Française', and on the right 'Rothschild Frères'. Behind the humour, of course, lay the insinuation that the cold-blooded monster of finance had grabbed the reins of the chariot of State.

A few days later, Exbury won the Prix Daru at Longchamp. A friend repeated to me the comment of a racegoer: 'Ah, that Rothschild! First at Longchamp, first at Matignon!' The press embroidered on the same theme, for example (again from the *Canard Enchaîné*): 'Pompidou, of the Rothschild stable, wins the Grand Prix Matignon!'

Georges left us regretfully. While he threw himself wholeheartedly into his new role, I know it took him longer than most people realized to feel totally at ease in it.

A few months later, in a letter to Marie-Hélène, dated 13 August 1962, he wrote:

> . . . and Guy? I thought he looked very well. But still a bit worried. I imagine he must worry about you, but I had the impression that he was also concerned about me and must be afraid that I'll let myself be caught up 'in the game'. Tell him he'd be wrong to worry about this. Of course, I can't say within three months exactly when I'll be able to tear myself away from politics; but he should know that I'm in this despite myself, and I don't let my head be turned in the least by 'power', and that I'll get out of it as soon as I can. You mustn't repeat this to anyone, because nothing is more ridiculous than a Prime Minister who talks about resigning. But he should know that it's a certainty: when I've served my time, I'll leave – I may be mistaken, but I had the feeling that Guy had his doubts about this. If so, please reassure him. If not, don't mention any of this to him . . .

In the light of Georges's ultimate destiny, this letter poses several questions:

Why did he so insist on his lack of interest in politics?

One could sense his obsession for independence, his virtual horror of public life and the constraints it imposed, of conforming to a rigorous schedule. He hated timetables and routine. At the bank, he worked as hard if not harder than anyone else; but sometimes he'd disappear for an hour or two to visit an art exhibition or stroll through the bookshops. In

private life, he loved surprises, friendship, song. In fact, he was one of the rare political figures to reach such heights without ever having aspired to a political career. A good example was his refusal to move from his apartment on the Île Saint-Louis to the Matignon palace, which seemed almost provocative at the time. It was Claude who announced the decision, with humour and in her characteristic outspoken, spontaneous manner: 'I don't care for secondary residences!'

But then, why did Pompidou accept the office of Prime Minister?

A phrase in that same letter repeats and confirms what he often told me in person: 'When I've served my time, I'll leave . . .' But his admiration for de Gaulle was unconditional; he couldn't refuse to undertake a mission for him. Just long enough to get the machine of State back on the tracks.

But why then, one might insist, did he stay on as Prime Minister for six years? And above all, why did he become President of France? Contrary to what some people may think, a 'taste for power' had absolutely nothing to do with it. Georges was a winner. Like all men engaged in a combat with the future at stake, he could never consider his mission accomplished. While the reasons for these decisions will remain forever buried in the depths of his conscience, I can attest to the fact that he was the least personally ambitious man I've ever known.

And so Georges left the rue Laffitte. My personal regret was greater than my pride in seeing a close friend reach such an eminent position. Although, as I've said, I wasn't really surprised, I was certainly impressed by the progress he'd made. The Georges I first met, a bit retiring, a bit shy, a bit awkward, too courteous and discreet to push himself into the limelight, had become much more at ease, more self-confident. I'd witnessed the evolution of an exceptional individual finally asserting himself in his own eyes. Of course, during his years at the rue Laffitte Georges hadn't changed on the political or intellectual plane; but on the plane of human relations and of faith in his destiny, he was another person. Or rather, the same person, but more conscious of his worth.

We used to have lunch together, just the two of us, about once a month; he'd either come discreetly to my Pennaroya office on the Place Vendôme, or else invite me to Matignon. When circumstances still permitted him to spend a weekend at Ferrières, he was the same as ever: still launching into impassioned discussions with the same outward calm, the same conviction, the same restrained ardour.

During his first few months as Prime Minister, he made a gesture towards me that was typical of his inherent thoughtfulness: knowing how much I disliked having to decide upon the salaries of our associates and staff every year, he insisted that the personnel in charge of this come to see him at the end of the year so that he could go over with them the salary proposals,

which he then returned to me along with his suggestions. A small gesture, perhaps, but so typical of him.

During our luncheons, he enjoyed summarizing series of ideas in a concise phrase. Without wishing to put words in the mouth of the departed, I recall one time before some election or other when he swept away the Socialist promises with a metaphor: 'It's like Croesus squandering his treasure in a few months in order to be acclaimed, without ever dreaming that it will soon be his turn to hold out his hand and beg for alms. The Socialists in power in France: when they leave, there's no danger of their taking the cash-box with them; it will be empty.'

I continued to be just as outspoken with him as he was with me. At Pennaroya one day, a short while after the furious scandal de Gaulle had caused by shouting 'Vive le Québec Libre!' (Long live Free Quebec) during an official visit to Canada, I asked him point-blank: 'Georges, the General seems to me to be getting more and more aggressive as he grows older. The day will come when you'll have to choose between your patriotism and your fidelity. Which will it be?'

Surprised by my question, as if he'd never envisaged the problem, he thought it over for a long moment: 'No. I don't think de Gaulle will ever adopt an attitude contrary to the best interests of France. Or only outwardly. I don't think I'll ever have to face that dilemma . . . ' After a pause, he added: 'At least I hope not . . . '

I recall another remark he made, when he was no longer Prime Minister. A tragic incident had occurred at Fort-Chabrol, near Bordeaux: a madman, after shooting a gendarme, barricaded himself in a barn with his two children, whom he threatened to kill. Contrary to all common sense, the Prefect gave the order to attack, and the police found only three dead bodies.

'You see,' Pompidou told me, 'this sort of thing reflects on the government. And it's not at all its role to be on the receiving end of pointless attacks. A sound administration should be able to react quickly and to inspire quick reactions. Alas, public office kills the sense of responsibility.'

On 13 April 1962, General Jouhaud was condemned to death.

He was one of the rebellious French Army officers in Algeria who vainly hoped to keep 'Algérie Française'. General Salan, the titular head of the conspiracy, had already been judged and escaped with his life. Whereupon, it was said, de Gaulle went into a towering rage. Be that as it may, a military court condemned Jouhaud to death; his pardon was in the hands of the General, who was not disposed to grant it. But Pompidou's opinion was that Jouhaud should not be executed: he wasn't the leader of

the rebellion, he was born in Algeria; there were more excuses for his action. Georges was determined to obtain his pardon at any price. 'If I fail to persuade the General, I'll resign. I've told him so.'

Begrudgingly, de Gaulle finally gave in to his arguments and pardoned Jouhaud. But during the following week, so Georges told me, the furious President wouldn't speak to him, answering his questions only in monosyllables, like a sulking child. De Gaulle, who had yielded neither to Churchill, to Roosevelt, nor to destiny, had been obliged to cede to a man even more obstinate than he. I don't think he enjoyed it.

Thanks to our friendship with the Pompidous, we were often invited to official receptions and festivities in honour of visiting heads of state. The Elysée palace, the Opéra, the Château of Versailles – de Gaulle, at the height of his glory, seemed at home everywhere, without having to dazzle his guests by displays of fireworks or fountains. He played the role of host with the slightly blasé, polite nonchalance of someone who would have preferred to be elsewhere. I was invited several times to the Presidential shoots at Marly and had an opportunity there to approach him in a less 'military' manner than during our first meeting in London. Extremely courteous, he was still the same cold, distant personage . . . I never had the feeling that he was a man to break the ice.

It was during the events of May 1968 that the French nation measured the real merits of Georges Pompidou.

Student demonstrations ignited discontent in other sectors, particularly among the factory workers. There were rowdy demonstrations, occupation of University buildings, general strikes – in other words, chaos, with an underlying scent of civil war.

In my view, this was Pompidou's finest hour, in the sense that a crisis brings out the true quality of a man. With the government falling apart, authority disintegrating, he was the rock no tempest could dislodge.

So much has been written to explain (and exploit) these events, that everyone can find documentary support for their opinions. That's not the question. As always after a crisis, everybody claims to have foreseen it long in advance; but at the time, nobody grasped the significance of what was happening. And the more delirious the atmosphere, the more the spectre of revolution loomed – a romantic, dangerous revolution – the more the government lost its means of control and action. The powerless administration seemed to behave blindly and ineptly, while giant demonstrations succeeded one another, like serpents biting their tails.

Some people jumped on a plane; the more impatient politicians jumped on the bandwagon; the others waited to see which way the wind was blowing . . . Paris feared the worst.

None of it made sense. Aragon gave a moving speech in favour of youth, in the heart of the student quarter on the Boulevard St Michel; he was told to return to his copybooks by jeering students. Other speeches evoked the wildest dreams. Witticisms flourished, cobblestones flew, cars that had been set on fire illuminated the warm nights. But there was the risk that these turbulent children playing with fireworks would kindle a terrible blaze. The police were overwhelmed, some people suggested calling in the Army. There was no more response from the controls; the administration came to a standstill.

And de Gaulle, who had navigated through other storms (with such masterly skill!) . . . even he no longer had a firm hold on the tiller. His legendary oratory rang hollow, his television appearance was like the replay of an old film, his suggestions seemed unrealistic. Between strikes in the factories and parades in the streets, he floundered blindly, bewildered, uncertain; he seemed to have lost that instinctive contact with the French people which was his strong point and which he considered the very foundation of his 'legitimacy'. He'd also lost his political touch. Not knowing what to do, he disappeared.

I went to the bank as usual, but with no particular purpose, just on principle, because nobody came there. I felt no fear, but I couldn't understand how such a healthy entity as France could suddenly reveal such sickness; how the cement of our society could so suddenly give way. Such absurd folly carried to such an extreme, such madness claiming to be reason – it gave me a feeling of inner anxiety.

Many observers, trying in vain to fathom the mystery of these inexplicable events, thought de Gaulle should make the spectacular gesture of changing his Prime Minister and cabinet. Whatever his intentions may have been when he disappeared from Paris for several long hours in the midst of the turbulence, he returned 'exorcized'. Having recovered the faculties of 'the great' de Gaulle, he made a masterly speech to the nation: clear, incisive, imperious. His categorical affirmation of confidence in Pompidou, his lavish praise for him and for his actions, removed all doubt, put an end to hesitation; his firm resolution dissolved anxiety. He confidently invited the population of Paris to take part in a parade in support of his government and in refusal of disorder. A handful of faithful supporters was expected; hundreds of thousands of Parisians turned out. Marie-Hélène left her sick-bed and we walked up the Champs-Elysées to the Arc de Triomphe in the midst of an incredible throng, shouting slogans, dancing, singing, waving flags, cheered by countless more people on the rooftops, everyone intoxicated with joy and triumph.

The masquerade was over.

During the darkest moment of the storm of 1968, the only man who seemed to remain cool was Georges Pompidou.

On his return from Afghanistan (where he was on an official visit when the student demonstrations erupted), it was obvious that he was on his own. What did it matter whether or not he made a mistake in reopening the Sorbonne? He'd taken over the reins; that was what counted. For one thing is sure: at first, Pompidou assessed the full extent of the phenomena no better than anybody else. But, in riding terms, he brought the horse back in hand, tried to set the pace that suited him. The still vague threat of the drama already underlined his profile of tranquil sage. A little authority, a little liberalism: the professor hoped to calm his unruly class; he'd been through it before. (He confided to me later one of the reasons for his apparent hesitation at the beginning: his personal contacts with the labour unions had given him the assurance that all would return to order if only he authorized the reopening of the Sorbonne. But if promises were made, they were not kept.)

So the government drifted, the demonstrations continued – until the 'meeting of Grenelle', between leaders of labour, management and the government, presided over by the Prime Minister himself.

There are numerous accounts of these negotiations. It is my opinion and, I think, that of the majority of the French people, that the government recovered its wits; from then on, Pompidou dominated the situation. During three days and nights, he gave the impression of filling every role, smiling and calm, self-assured, surprising the labour union veterans by his fantastic physical stamina, stupefying everybody by the sharp, decisive spirit that lay within his rounded form.

Physically, morally, psychologically, he was the man who stood his ground, and that sufficed. I could distinguish in this a trait of his personal philosophy: the political error which irritated him most of all, which he considered unforgivable, was to smile at one's opponents while ignoring one's supporters. On the contrary, he thought one should ignore one's opponents and try to attract their adhesion by asserting one's own position. Steadfast when the bourgeoisie was going to pieces, he was the undisputed hero of Grenelle. The game was won, the situation reversed. Salary increases and other concessions were merely the price of victory. Pompidou had come through with flying colours.

It's always the final image, if it's an impressive one, that remains imprinted in the spectator's mind. Everybody, even those who didn't read the papers or who rejected the entire lot of worn-out politicians, was now convinced that only one person had unshakingly held onto the helm.

But already another game of chance was under way. A few weeks after

the Grenelle negotiations, Pompidou invited us to Matignon. His personal account of the events confirmed my previous impressions. Then one day in private, he told us, forsaking his usual reserve: 'During that period I lived through the most dramatic day of my life. When de Gaulle disappeared without giving me the slightest hint as to his intentions, merely saying over the phone the equivocal, '*Je vous embrasse*', the earth seemed to open beneath my feet. I felt the weight of abandonment on my shoulders, all the responsibility of the nation. I couldn't imagine what he planned to do; I feared the worst. It was the most agonizing moment of my life.'

The parliamentary elections seemed to confirm Pompidou's new stature as a hero.

De Gaulle wanted to revise his cabinet, but keep Pompidou as Prime Minister. Georges requested a delay of two weeks in which to think it over – certainly in order to reconsider his theory, which he's often explained to me: institutions of the Fifth Republic could function smoothly only when a hierarchy was maintained between the head of state and the head of government; if a Prime Minister remains too long in office, it results in a detrimental duality. He therefore considered it his duty to leave the government, at least for a certain length of time. But his entourage, his friends, naturally tried to convince him to continue in office, and they did not lack good arguments to back them up. Although Georges wasn't easily influenced, after long reflection, he finally adopted their view.

Well before the expiration of the agreed delay, he told the General that he was willing to stay on as Prime Minister. To which de Gaulle replied tersely: 'It's too late. I've made other arrangements.'

By chance, I was having lunch with Georges that day. He arrived completely demoralized. He was seething, fluctuating between anger and sorrow. He, who was always so self-controlled, seemed to have lost the balance and serenity that were his greatest strength. For the first time, I saw him touched to the quick, deeply wounded – and very angry.

It was now his turn to 'cross the desert'. Steeped in bitterness, his ideas no longer diffused their usual lofty idealism, his sceptical objectivity was replaced by a sort of rancour.

I took the initiative of having a serious talk with him, attempting a virtual amateur psychoanalysis of his relationship with de Gaulle:

'I've wanted to have this rather sensitive conversation with you for some time. I've given a lot of thought to the psychological situation in which you find yourself. De Gaulle has always behaved like a cold monster towards everyone who comes close to him. His indifference towards other human beings is notorious; in fact, it's a trait he shares with all great

statesmen, who can't allow matters of state to be influenced by personal scruples. But in de Gaulle's case, it also seems to include a sort of disdain for humanity in general: unconditional supporters lack character; courtiers are mercenary; the rest are hypocrites. And whatever the evidence of their mediocrity, all of them are merely insignificant actors on the political and historical scene of France. You, Georges, on the contrary, and you alone, have negated this conviction by your virtue, your disinterest, your ability. Throughout the years, the General has given you countless proofs of his friendship and esteem. He's entrusted you with his most personal affairs. He's welcomed you into his family, along with your wife and son. He's kept you in his government while dismissing everyone else. You are the only person in whom he's found a filial devotion, an absence of personal ambition, an intellectual 'synergy'. You've had the satisfaction and pride of being the only person admitted into that inaccessible, haughty fortress, of being appreciated for your morality and your ability.

'And then in June of last year, he suddenly treated you like a stranger, the favourite son sent back to the rank and file. You'd have understood his decision to make a change of Prime Minister; in fact you'd have agreed with him. But you weren't prepared for such a cruel dismissal.

'You're suffering from a wounded heart, my dear Georges, rather than from wounded pride. To put it bluntly, you thought de Gaulle loved you like a son, and you're feeling like a son whose father has rejected him.'

Georges remained silent. Our conversation came to an end. But the next day he said to Marie-Hélène: 'Guy is very perceptive.'

His removal from the government was not the principal reason for Georges's distress. It was the manner in which it had been handled. It seemed to destroy his image, the image he had of himself. So haughty and off-hand a reply from de Gaulle, his coldness, his aloofness. Pompidou must have often been a witness to the same behaviour towards others; for the first time, he was the victim.

No doubt of it, he was wounded; I could almost see the blood. Other circumstances, alas! would make it even worse.

A little while later, the Markovic affair erupted: a murky scandal set off by the mysterious murder of a Yugoslav refugee, in which the yellow press implicated by innuendo celebrities from the world of cinema, art . . . and even, by insinuation, the name of Madame Pompidou. (Faked photographs were circulated.)

Not only did the blow of this outrageous calumny strike Georges in his most sensitive spot: his honour as a man, husband and father (though practically invulnerable to criticism, he'd fly into a rage if anyone dared to make a disparaging remark about Claude or his son Alain), but even more: he discovered the ignobility of humanity, the real nature of politics, the

destructive weapons he'd always chosen to ignore, the slander, the meanness. Hardened politicians have had time to steel their hearts; perfidious arrows cannot pierce hides that have been toughened in the process of political campaigns. But Georges had no such armour; he'd never needed one, since he'd never had to fight in that arena.

Although the fabricated scandal was rapidly proven to be a tissue of lies as far as he and his family were concerned, Georges was still upset. Behind the slander he detected the evident intention to ruin his political career. What caused him the greatest pain and outrage was the fact that the government, which must have known of the affair in advance (particularly Couve de Murville, then Prime Minister), not to mention de Gaulle himself, had never made a move to warn him, nor to refute the unfounded defamation. It was all the less comprehensible since even Madame de Gaulle, whose rigid moral standards were legendary, had immediately contacted the Pompidous personally in order to express her indignation.

I am convinced that these incidents undermined the inner resistance of that stalwart man. Modern medicine tries to trace the origin of illness – even accidental or contagious ones – back to the intimate psychical history of the patient. And I therefore affirm that Georges Pompidou's death was caused by the 'dirty tricks' of politics.

I wouldn't presume to pass judgement on General de Gaulle who, I'm convinced, never wanted to get rid of Pompidou. On the contrary, he obviously considered him a worthy successor. He even advised him once: 'You should travel more, make yourself known abroad.' The political testament he entrusted to Pompidou (and never withdrew, in spite of their undeniable estrangement) – that testament which Pompidou revealed to the nation the day de Gaulle died, is another proof of it. If de Gaulle had a score to settle, it was with France – or rather, with the French, who seemed to have had enough of him. And the 1969 referendum which so many of his close advisers, not the least of whom was Pompidou, considered suicidal, was basically merely a desperate attempt to reply to the doubts of the nation, to defy appearances, to re-establish the lost contact.

In any case, Georges Pompidou continued to be haunted by the Markovic affair long after most people had forgotten it. He couldn't forgive those who had betrayed him. From then on, there were the true friends who had had the courage to speak to de Gaulle, those who could have but didn't, and the ignominious ones who had abandoned him. Although I never saw it myself, I was told that Georges kept a little black notebook in which were inscribed the names of the people he'd vowed never to see again.

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During one whole year he didn't seem the same man; he was visibly tormented. As for the hint he was reported to have dropped in Rome

(where, according to the AFP correspondent, Pompidou implied that he might have a 'national destiny'), he assured me repeatedly that there had never been in the back of his mind the slightest ulterior motive, the slightest intention of undermining the General's position. When Marie-Hélène asked him the direct question, he replied: 'I swear I didn't have the least political interest in talking to those reporters. There was never any "appel de Rome". It was all a pure invention of the press. I fell into a trap.'

After the referendum (I can't remember whether it was before or after Pompidou's election as President of France), Marie-Hélène told him of a presentiment that haunted her:

'Georges,' she said, 'your life has been dominated by the number seven: seven years as a professor, seven years in the Ministry of Tourism, seven years at the bank, seven years as Prime Minister. This means that you can't be re-elected for a second term. But what I'm saying is nonsense, because who could ever defeat you?'

Marie-Hélène was unaware of his malady, and could not have imagined that death was to make her prediction come true.

After Pompidou became President of France, our meetings were less frequent. I suppose we both by tacit agreement considered it advisable to avoid laying ourselves open to criticism. He was too respectful of his position to make social visits, even to see close friends, and he no longer came to Ferrières for the weekend. Once though, when Marie-Hélène was very ill, protocol gave precedence to friendship, and he came to have dinner at the foot of her bed, after every precaution had been taken to ensure his visit remained in the greatest secrecy. I continued to accept the invitations to the annual Presidential shoots, and we attended a few private receptions at the Elysée palace.

Nevertheless, the presidential function created a certain distance between us. Georges himself didn't change, nor were our feelings affected by his lofty position, by any secret wish to impress, to uphold a certain prestige. I think it more likely that the first effects of his mortal illness (a rare form of leukaemia) altered Georges's relationships with all of his close friends. One evening at the Opera, I was struck to find him so bloated, so ill at ease, almost running away as if he wished to hide his malady, even before it had become a subject of speculation.

I had lunch alone with him one day about two months before he died. He gave me the impression then of really being himself again. He was well, he sat down, got up again, laughed; he was bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked. I was relieved, truly happy. The calendar seemed to have been turned back fifteen years! I was convinced that his health was improving.

One of his close associates told me later that Pompidou, without

mentioning his malady, had led him to believe that he intended to resign soon; but beforehand, there seemed to be something he wanted to do, some step he wanted to take – something, at least, that he wanted to accomplish before retiring. But we'll undoubtedly never know what it was.

While circumstances made our meetings less frequent, we still remained very close at heart, like true friends whom life has separated, but who continue to advance on parallel paths. An anecdote is proof of it.

It happened in 1973. Christmas was drawing near. Marie-Hélène had not yet found a present for Georges. A true perfectionist, she enjoys nothing more than unearthing the object that suits the person she likes and which will give the greatest pleasure. She finally returned home triumphantly one evening and showed me a work by the sculptor François-Xavier Lalanne (whom we didn't know at the time, but who has since become, along with his wife Claude, one of our closest friends). It was a white porcelain duck, floating among metal waterlilies. A slight tremor of the lily pads evoked the surface of the pond. The immobility of the duck, the gleaming waterlilies, the trembling pads, and above all the absence of water, all contributed to give this unusual object a dream-like dimension. Georges was bound to love it.

'And you know,' Marie-Hélène said, 'it's really a miracle! Only three copies exist. The Sèvres Museum bought one, and this was the last. It was already reserved, and I had to fight like a tiger to get it.'

The next day, an enormous parcel was delivered and taken to the 'pink room' to await the Christmas-wrapping ritual – a procedure which is one of Marie-Hélène's favourite follies: two or three people, surrounded by masses of wrapping paper and ribbons, are kept busy preparing the beautiful packages that will be piled underneath the Christmas tree at Ferrières.

On 23 December, a Ionesco-style dialogue took place between Marie-Hélène, the children's nanny and the chauffeur:

'Juliette, will you please have Monsieur Pompidou's duck brought here?'

'But Madame, the duck is already at Ferrières, I saw it there yesterday.'

'That's impossible, Juliette, it's in the pink room. Pierre, did you deliver a brown parcel some six feet long and four feet wide to Ferrières?'

'No, Madame . . . '

'You see, Juliette, the duck can't have walked there or flown to the château on its own wings!'

'I assure you, Madame, it's there. I saw it.'

Anger, threats of resignation. Both were adamant.

That same evening, Marie-Hélène went to Ferrières and had to accept the evidence: the duck was there in its package in a corner of the great hall, patiently waiting to be gift-wrapped. Juliet was jubilant.

But the next morning, the duck had the last laugh: it was still waiting, just as patiently, but this time in a corner of the pink room in Paris! And the solution to the mystery was clear: Georges Pompidou had chosen the same duck, the third one, for us, and had had it delivered to Ferrières. Familiar with the habits of the household, he knew that Marie-Hélène systematically re-wrapped every package, so he'd seen no point in having it gift-wrapped!

Three months before his death, it was more than a coincidence. It was an omen. We were still on the same wavelength.

It's too soon to know what place Georges Pompidou will occupy in the history of France. In my opinion, he will increase in stature as time goes by.

Let me offer a few pieces of evidence: some people have tried to minimize his achievements, to reduce them to the simple ambition of industrializing France. Yes, but the trend had already started. The paradox is that this man of peasant background and Mediterranean culture should have applied all his strength and will to accelerating the process. But that isn't the most important point.

Pompidou inherited the overwhelming task of succeeding a great man. Who could follow a head of state so solitary on his Mount Olympus? Who else but a head of state who was close to the French people. The mere fact that no decline of prestige or authority ensued seems to me a miracle. The fact that the transition from a superman to a normal one should have been made through such an unassuming person seems to me an irony of history. And the fact that, after the de Gaulle mystique, the French never had the feeling that his too-heroic statue was being overturned, will always remain to Pompidou's credit.

It was thanks to him that the institutions of the Fifth Republic acquired stability. After the grandeur and the dream, the nation needed a realist. Georges Pompidou was able to fill that role, he whose soul was instilled with sensitivity and poetry! This man attuned to the rhythm of the earth was able to lead the nation forward, slowly but surely, like a peasant taking his time to reach the end of the furrow.

On 2 April 1974, we were dining with my cousin Alain when my son David called to tell me that the radio had just announced the death of Georges Pompidou. We were stunned, speechless. Emotion and sorrow gripped our hearts. Marie-Hélène and I left like robots, unable even to say good-bye. For almost an hour, Marie-Hélène couldn't utter a word. We were joined by friends; we sat up all night long talking about him.

A few days later, *Le Monde* published an article: 'As I Knew Him', in

Marie-Hélène and her sister Sybil.

The beautiful Maggie van Zuylen, Marie-Hélène's mother.

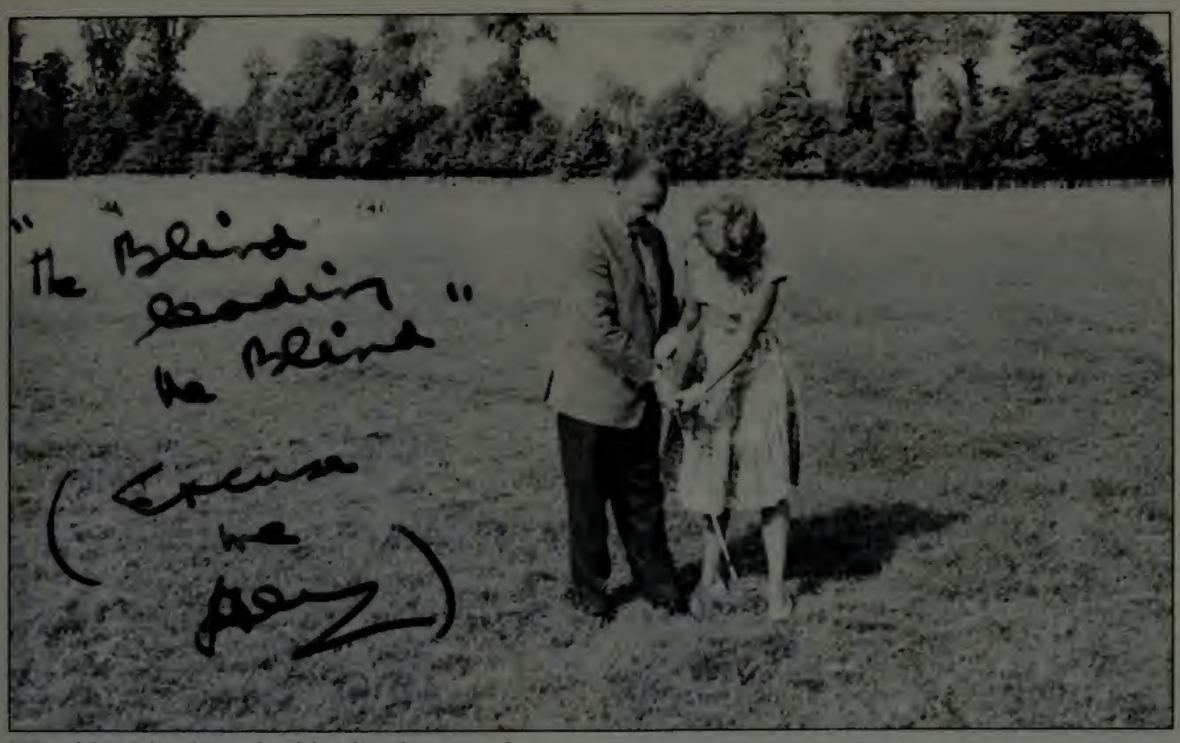
Can you top this?

'Noble in heart as well as in style.' – Egmont van Zuylen.

The young mother with her two sons:
Philippe and Edouard.

Philippe and his trumpet under the
Christmas tree.

Edouard and Philippe at the polo ground: ready for the match!



'The blind leading the blind': photo and comment by golf champion Henry Cotton judging his pupils Georges Pompidou and Marie-Hélène.

My mother is happy, Marie-Hélène radiant, David has grown up.

Three racing fans at Deauville: Edouard, Guy, Philippe.

Two young eighteen-year-old girls: my future wife Marie-Hélène . . .

. . . and my step-daughter Lili Krahmer.

Chantilly 1960: Timandra wins the Prix de Diane.

David marries Olimpia Aldobrandini: Reux 1974.

David and Edouard on either side of Alix: the mayor married her son.

The hostess of the Proust Ball.

Cecil Beaton at the Proust Ball.

Proust Ball: Mme Paul-Annick Weiller.

Proust Ball: Mme Hélène Rochas.

Proust Ball: Vicomtesse de Ribes.

With Maria Callas: 'Singin' in the Rain'.

Two smiles: Marie-Hélène and Brigitte Bardot.

Arthur Rubinstein and Donna Anna-Maria Aldobrandini.

About to drink a toast with Georges Pompidou.

Professor Francis Perrin and Marie-Hélène.

'Fruit, flowers, leaves and branches . . .' (Marie-Hélène).

Marie-Hélène and David at the wedding of Nathaniel de Rothschild and Nili Limon.

which I tried to describe Pompidou as he was in private life, because already some preposterous commentaries were beginning to appear. Let me quote a few lines from it; they reveal the emotion of a friend who has just lost his friend:

> Georges Pompidou died young, suddenly, and notwithstanding his malady, unexpectedly. It's difficult to accept: one seeks him still, one recollects one's memories, one relives shared experiences, each in his own way . . .
>
> . . . Georges Pompidou has taken his place in history beside de Gaulle, having made an essential contribution to the continuation of his work, from 1958 until the end of his life. He knew how to stand up to de Gaulle when he felt it was his duty to do so; but on the personal plane, he was unable to resist him. He felt boundless admiration for him, filial devotion. De Gaulle was his ideal, his political cause, his inspiration.
>
> True to character, Georges Pompidou confronted illness with optimism, determination, nobility. For personal as well as public reasons, he preferred to bear his cross alone, without confiding in anyone, without seeking outside moral support, until the end, never flagging. Those who loved him discovered only after his death the isolation that separated them from him without their ever having suspected it.
>
> They feel the pain of having lost him twice.

CHAPTER

13

Bread, Butter and Garlic

While I naturally concentrated all of my energies during the immediate postwar period on revitalizing the 'dear old bank', I never lost from view our long-standing family engagement in industry. How could I guess that years later a combination of coincidences and of voluntary decisions would involve me in what was to become a French multi-national enterprise: IMETAL.

IMETAL . . . a difficult but thrilling adventure.

During the thirty years following World War II, the economic development of the western world rose to record-breaking heights. It was as if our own Château-Lafite had produced thirty exceptional vintages in succession! Much has been written about the American boom, the German and Japanese 'miracles', which produced tremendous growth in the major corporations of those countries. But in France, apart from a few exceptions, our industries had lacked scope; just as lack of size was restricting the development of our own bank. During the previous century, my family maintained traditional interests in raw materials; never, however, to the point of acquiring control of the companies in which they invested. So when I was encouraged to become active in this sector, I had no idea how far it would lead us. It's a long story – which began in 1962 and lasted until 1981.

The concrete, tangible aspect of the mining business contrasted sharply with the rather monotonous abstraction of figures and accounts that is the banker's lot. It appealed to the down-to-earth side of my nature, which is generally attributed to people like myself who were born under the sign of Taurus. Another point of contrast: whereas industry is generally concentrated within the developed countries, raw materials are imbued with a romantic flavour of wild, untamed frontiers . . . In my younger days, the giant English Rhodesian and South African mining companies were among the most glamorous and respected institutions of their time.

My family had always been one of the major shareholders in the British

Rio Tinto company, so named because it had mined copper ore deposits since the 19th century near a Spanish river called 'Rio Tinto', the Red River. (The nearby copper deposits must have at one time given the water a reddish hue.) But at the beginning of the war, the copper deposits were almost exhausted, and the company was extracting pyrites instead.

Traditionally, half of the capital of Rio Tinto was French, and two French directors sat on the Board. Our English cousins also had a close relationship with Rio Tinto; but due to the importance of our financial interest, it was the French Rothschilds who were entitled to designate these two directors. In 1955, I decided to break with my father's tradition of never during his lifetime wishing to see a Rothschild on the Board of a company of which we didn't have complete control. A vacancy arose; I announced my candidacy for the seat. My initiative was welcomed warmly . . . and I was to be a member of the Board for over twenty years – twenty years of continuous 'on the job training', as they say today, during which Rio Tinto experienced an extraordinary expansion, finally becoming the largest mining company as well as one of the largest multi-national companies in Europe.

In 1945, however, practically its sole asset was the Spanish mine. Due to the exceptional talent of its president, Sir Val Duncan, and of his friend Sir Mark Turner who succeeded him, the company expanded into Africa, Australia, South America, the United States and Canada, operating copper, uranium, lead and zinc mines, even in one case emeralds! The construction of this industrial and mining empire was achieved through a series of imaginative but carefully planned operations.

Soon after the war, Val Duncan persuaded the nationalistic Spanish government to allocate the necessary sterling in order to permit a Spanish group to buy the Rio Tinto mine. With this liquid capital and the aid of bank loans, guaranteed by watertight purchasing contracts for their future production, Val Duncan opened up new mines on other continents. Success engenders success. Rio Tinto eventually merged with an important lead and zinc company called 'Consolidated Zinc', whereupon it assumed its present name of 'Rio Tinto Zinc'. At each step its stock-market price rose; capital increases were easily realized, investors readily supplying a large amount of fresh capital through a number of rights issues.

It was exciting to follow and participate in the dramatic development of the company. I certainly learned as much, if not more, than from a Harvard Business School course! It gave me the opportunity to become familiar with business on an international scale, an experience available to all too few French industrialists and bankers. It also put me in contact with a number of outstanding men, such as Lord Carrington, who was later to become Mrs Thatcher's Foreign Minister.

It was intellectually taxing. However, I was quite surprised when one day the Board was asked to approve the cost of psychiatric treatment for the chief executive of one of the foreign subsidiaries who had suffered a nervous breakdown.

My family also owned 10 per cent of the capital of a French mining corporation which it had helped found in 1881 and of which we were still the largest individual shareholders: Pennaroya.

It had started out by operating a coal mine in Spain that was discovered in a most unusual way: a shepherd living in the region had a dog called 'El Terrible', who used to roam about the countryside during his master's siesta. He returned several times with his collar soiled by a blackish substance that intrigued the shepherd. One day he followed his dog and thus came upon the coal deposits of Pennaroya, a small village which still displays El Terrible's collar in its local museum.

The company later expanded its activities to include lead and zinc mines in Spain, France, Italy, North Africa and Brazil, as well as several small copper mines in Chile.

It has always been difficult to extract lead and zinc, two metals generally present in the same ore, which is widespread on our planet. Lead has been utilized for ages and is still extracted, smelted and refined using artisans' methods – that is to say, anyone can do it on a small scale. But, as in agriculture, so many producers are involved that it is impossible to keep production in line with varying world consumption, and the price fluctuates from (occasionally) high to (frequently) low. Most of Pennaroya's mines had a modest output; their installations were either too small or too out-of-date and inefficient. A modernization programme required important investments at a time when the slumping metal market was causing a drain on the company treasury.

Since 1884, my family also had a stake in nickel. It had been associated with the founding of the Société Le Nickel (SLN) for explorations in New Caledonia.

Since the dawn of mankind until the 18th century, nickel was considered not a metal but an unidentified alloy. Around 1650, some miners in Saxony working in the silver, cobalt and copper mines in the mountains there, came across an ore which, when refined, had a different colour from the ore which they were seeking. Unable to melt it down, they called it 'Kupfernickel'; being superstitious, they considered it an evil product of 'Nick', the mischievous mountain elf whose brother 'Kobalt' had already given his name to that metal. Quite the opposite of lead and zinc, nickel is found in very few regions of the world and can be treated only on a large

industrial scale. It has many uses, but is mainly associated with steel, which then becomes stainless.

The New Caledonian mines were discovered in 1880 by a Frenchman, Jules Garnier, who was the founder of the SLN. The company had prospered between the two World Wars, but had made no effort either to modernize or to expand. After 1945, the shareholders (among whom we were the most important) had to face some difficult decisions, including that of removing two chief executives. I was fortunate in being able to persuade Louis Devaux, who was retiring from the French Shell company, to switch over to nickel.

I'd noted that the world consumption of nickel had increased regularly since World War II at the rate of 5 per cent per year, and that INCO, the leading world producer, was a very prosperous company. However, as long as the French franc remained so weak (which was to be until 1960), there was an obvious advantage in spending francs to make a product which could be sold for dollars.

Despite this favourable context, two major problems had to be solved: first, to finance and achieve a vast programme of expansion (in which Kaiser Aluminum, the American company, was willing to collaborate with us); and then to try somehow to obtain a reform of the fiscal system in New Caledonia: its present one, which taxed sales rather than profits, was economically crippling.

In 1961, my friend and associate René Fillon kept me informed of the financial troubles of Pennaroya, of which he had become Vice-Chairman after leaving the bank.

Together we created a study group to investigate the management methods headed by a young engineer, Bernard de Villemejane, who had been recruited by Georges Pompidou, at that time General Manager of the bank. As a result of this report, we decided to take the business in hand, with Pompidou in charge as President. Destiny, in the form of General de Gaulle, decided otherwise: Georges Pompidou was named Prime Minister in the spring of 1962. Rather than seek a replacement, I decided to assume the task myself.

And so I found myself, a bit too suddenly for my taste, at the head of a company listed on the Stock Exchange, with a prestigious staff of mining engineers and polytechnicians, and several thousand employees throughout France, Italy, Spain, North Africa and South America. My first concern was naturally to establish my authority, to win the confidence of this élite personnel in order to ensure the smooth takeover of the top responsibilities by Villemejane. His charm and good nature, his simplicity, ability and judgement, were so quickly apparent to all, that I was

able to name him chief executive even sooner than I'd hoped. From the start, we had a harmonious relationship. During seventeen years, our mutual confidence never faltered. (When I retired, I asked him to become Chairman of the Board of IMETAL, in addition to his Pennaroya post.)

The new management which took over Pennaroya in 1962 faced some serious problems: technical problems to start with, of which the most complicated was the adjustment of a new furnace at the zinc foundry in Nouvelle-Godault, not far from Paris. Originally built to furnish an output of 30,000 tons per year, it was far from attaining that production level. However, after several years of effort, our engineers succeeded in increasing its annual output to . . . 120,000 tons!

Next there were problems of a commercial nature. The company, not yet equipped to handle its own marketing, had to depend on an outside commercial organization. This had to be remedied.

Then the financial problems: we had to provide Pennaroya with the financial means for acquiring a number of small companies – small producers of lead and zinc oxides, as well as scrap metal firms.

Finally, there was politics: after lengthy negotiations with the local government in Sardinia, we succeeded in liquidating the mines we had been operating there without the slightest hope of ever breaking even.

In 1967, nonferrous metals were pulling out of the slump, and we seized the opportunity to infuse fresh capital into Pennaroya in order to reduce its indebtedness as well as to finance new technical developments at the Noyelle-Godault foundry and in various mines. I'd learned through my experience with Rio Tinto that the vitality of an industrial concern depends on its financial strength, so I sought to give Pennaroya the financing it required. It was the period when COFIREP (of which I wrote earlier) had a lot of cash and had also lost its oil exploration assets in Algeria. I therefore suggested that COFIREP buy one million six hundred thousand shares of Pennaroya for 160 million francs. The Annual General Meetings of both companies voted in favour of this transaction, as a result of which COFIREP acquired 40 per cent of Pennaroya. Another 10 per cent was owned by the Compagnie du Nord (along with 10 per cent of SLN). When COFIREP merged with the Compagnie du Nord a short while later, the entire 50 per cent were thus in the same hands.

In order to complete the structure, I wanted to merge Pennaroya and Le Nickel into a single company, with a single management, which would exploit the entire range of nonferrous metals. At this point, the Compagnie du Nord held 10 per cent of the capital of SLN and 50 per cent of Pennaroya. I then proceeded to the final stage of the operation: the Compagnie du Nord exchanged its 50 per cent holding in Pennaroya for shares representing 20 per cent of the capital of SLN (which itself

thereafter controlled Pennaroya), becoming by far the largest shareholder. The SLN, at the same time, apart from its own exploitations, had acquired more than half of the capital of Pennaroya, which was henceforth its subsidiary.

Shortly after this fundamental reorganization, Villemejane learned that the Compagnie de Suez possessed a large shareholding in an old, inactive mining company called MOKTA, which it wanted to dispose of. I negotiated with Jacques Georges-Picot, the President of Suez, suggesting a public offer to exchange the MOKTA shares for part cash, part shares in Le Nickel (SLN). The offer was so well received that SLN acquired more than 90 per cent of MOKTA. MOKTA itself controlled another old mining venture in Peru called HUARON, which also owned useful assets in Europe. This acquisition proved to be very beneficial and produced increasing profits every year.

Needless to say, my activities related to this corporate restructuring entailed a lot of travelling to visit existing mines and plants as well as sites of new ones: in south-west France, in Cartagena (Spain), in Crotone (the home of Archimedes, at the very tip of the Italian boot). All these visits followed the same ritual: I inspected the layout, talked to the staff and to the local dignitaries; then, during what was generally a very picturesque reception, I gave a speech to the general public.

But I also travelled further abroad: our mine in Chile was situated at an altitude of 10,000 feet, where I silently suffered the agony of mountain sickness. In order to reach New Caledonia, I flew from San Francisco, accompanied by the managers of Kaiser Aluminum, who were our partners in expanding the foundry there. Before the trip, Henry Kaiser, son of the famous builder of World War II Liberty ships, graciously entertained us at his home in Oakland.

It was during this voyage that I was invited to address the financial community of San Francisco at a luncheon. The dollar was then weak, and the American press was harshly critical of European countries for keeping their currency too high. Quite the reverse of conditions today! During my speech I explained that all currencies, at all times, were seeing their purchasing power diminish; it was a constant of history. And the American reaction made me think of the captain of a sinking ship complaining that the other ships weren't sinking faster than his! Everyone laughed heartily.

From the beginning of 1972, one could see a new depression coming in the metals market, and it became an urgent matter for us to obtain from the government a major change in the archaic and illogical Caledonian tax system. Louis Devaux insisted that I take his place as Chairman of

SLN, believing that I'd be in a stronger position than he to handle the negotiations. And so I abandoned the presidency of Pennaroya to assume that of the mother company, SLN.

During the prosperous 1960s, we had formed an association with Kaiser Aluminum for the purpose of considerably increasing the production capacity of our nickel foundry in Nouméa. At the time, extracting nickel from the rich mines in Caledonia was very profitable. But the capital required for the important expansion we had in mind was far too great for our company to provide without borrowing dollars on a medium term basis. At the first signs of another economic crisis, the Kaiser management became alarmed and decided to pull out. It's never advisable to try to hang on to a reluctant partner. But SLN was already overstretched, and we wondered what we should do.

As I was studying this apparently insoluble problem, Pierre Guillaumat, Chairman of Pétroles d'Aquitaine, informed us as a matter of courtesy that his company intended to diversify by going into nickel production, exploiting deposits in another part of Caledonia. Although the conclusion for us was evident, we considered the matter very carefully and for some time before initiating negotiations with Aquitaine. Our purpose was threefold: to find a replacement for Kaiser; to prevent the arrival in Caledonia of a competitor; and to obtain from the government, always pleased to see a state-controlled company (as is Aquitaine) increase its territory, a new tax statute in New Caledonia. From Guillaumat's point of view, it was clearly much cheaper to buy into a going concern than to start from scratch on his own.

After several months of negotiations, we came to an agreement: all of the nickel industry belonging to SLN was conveyed to a new subsidiary which bought out the Kaiser interests, and half of it was sold to Aquitaine for 573 million francs; the government gave its blessing by granting the tax modification we had been seeking.

At the time, I didn't realize how vital it would be for us later to have divested ourselves of half of the nickel industry. In 1979, at the meeting during which I retired from the Chairmanship, I sat next to the Governor of the Société Générale de Belgique, who whispered in my ear: 'You were really smart to have sold your half-share in Nickel.' To which I replied: 'And I was an ass not to have sold the other half!'

Since the corporate name of SLN went to the nickel subsidiary, we had to find a new one for our mother company. We finally decided on IMETAL.

At the time these complicated negotiations were going on, nickel was a highly coveted metal and our high-grade deposits were greatly envied.

The Chairman of an American company contacted me with a view to entering into partnership with us. I told him that other negotiations were already under way and would, if successful, naturally have priority. He obviously didn't believe me and thought that I was playing 'hard to get'. So, behind my back, he bought up as much of our stock as he could lay his hands on. The price soared. In Paris, we were at a loss to identify the buyer. But when our deal with Aquitaine was made public, the buying orders suddenly stopped, and we discovered who had been behind it. It is my view that buying secretly into a company with which one is negotiating in good faith is not entirely ethical. When he visited me in Paris a few months later, I was as cold as ice.

The project of creating a modest multi-national firm, on which we had embarked with Villemejane, was beginning to take shape. We now set about studying our cash investments so as to consolidate them and also to diversify IMETAL. We decided to look around in the United States for a company in the field of manufacturing (no more mining) which would fit in with the experience and expertise of our organization.

We commissioned the Rothschild subsidiary in New York (then called New Court Securities), along with the investment banking firm Kuhn, Loeb, to seek a possible acquisition which would suit our requirements. After much research and many eliminations, we decided on Copperweld.

It was a company that produced steel tubes and special bimetallic alloys, with headquarters in Pittsburgh. We were warned that its Chairman and chief executive, Philip Smith, would put up a fight for his independence. As in a military operation, we prepared our takeover bid in total secrecy. Our lawyers also warned me that I might have to face unpleasant personal attacks; I assured them that nothing would induce me to back out. During the preparatory period, Villemejane and I made several trips to New York. When the price of the stock began to rise abruptly in August 1975, several days before we'd planned to announce our offer, it was clear there'd been a leak somewhere. We had to make our bid at once.

As soon as it was made public, we were thrown into the limelight. An initial meeting between Villemejane, our advisers and Philip Smith, was a total failure; the battle was on. An appeal was made to the Federal Court of Pittsburgh, which froze our bid. And the legal system took over.

The Court was asked to decide whether our takeover bid infringed in any way American law, and in particular, the Anti-Trust laws. We soon learned that legal procedures in the United States are entirely different from those in France. We didn't know that all our files and archives would have to be turned over to the opposing lawyers, who would be free to interrogate us at great length. In France, one is normally called upon to demonstrate one's good faith, one's competence, one's honourable

behaviour, one's unimpeachable attitude. What a surprise to be told that in the United States one must show as low a profile as possible; answer questions with 'yes' or 'no', or preferably 'I don't know'! Our litigating lawyer made us rehearse our parts, and instructed us to act 'ignorant and dumb'.

Our takeover bid had aroused a great deal of public interest. A man who recognized me in a hotel lift one day said: 'I hope you win!' (I think he must have had a bet on me!)

I was invited to appear before a State Inquiry Board presided over by an Ohio senator, because the Copperweld management had spread the rumour that if our takeover bid was successful, we would close a factory located in that state. My lawyers made me politely decline. Union delegates paraded in front of the Capitol and the French Embassy in Washington, carrying banners with inscriptions hostile to 'the Baron'. The press published numerous articles about my 'invasion'; some for, some against. Congressmen and government officials were interviewed. Even the American Embassy in Paris and the French Embassy in Washington were brought into the 'affair'.

The case was to come to court in the middle of September in Pittsburgh. We decided I would attend all of the sessions in order to familiarize myself with the procedure, and also as a gesture of courtesy towards the sole presiding judge.

On the second day of the hearings, as I was leaving for lunch, I was accosted in the street by a few labour union members who wanted to give me a petition bearing 100,000 signatures, which was stuffed in several large canvas bags. In the presence of television cameras, I assured them that I had no intention of depriving them of their jobs. I then said that I couldn't accept the bags because I had no means of transporting them. They replied that neither did they. 'Then we're in the same boat!' I said, as I walked calmly away with my lawyer, after shaking hands (but with a feeling that they hadn't understood my attempt at humour), and adding: 'God bless you and goodbye!' When we were out of earshot, I said: 'In France, they'd have given me a much rougher time!' To which he replied: 'You forget the fact that they all vote Republican!'

The judge took a dim view of this demonstration in front of the courthouse involving one of the parties in the case he was hearing. From then on, the Marshal was instructed to escort me through a back door.

Smith's lawyers tried to prove that IMETAL and myself were part of a giant conspiracy involving all the public and private companies that had the slightest direct or indirect connection with us; and that poor little Copperweld was about to be strangled in this monstrous spider's web.

The next day I was on the witness stand all morning. Following my

lawyers' instructions, I answered briefly, patiently, with dignity, the interminable list of questions that had already been thrashed out during the previous two days. After a couple of hours, I couldn't refrain from inserting a few barbs, which undermined the self-assurance of the opposing lawyer, made the audience smile and worried my own lawyer. At one point, the opposing lawyer alluded to the code names we'd given to the three companies we were considering taking over before reaching our final decision: 'Bread, butter and garlic'; 'bread' stood for Copperweld. Sensing the sympathetic attitude of the judge, who was seated high behind me, I half-turned my head and murmured, 'I'm glad we chose bread, because I hate garlic!' He replied just as softly: 'Me too!' To which he added: 'I'm sure that after all this you'll feel more like a double whisky!'

During a recess that morning, I met Philip Smith, and after exchanging a few polite words, we discovered that neither of us was as inhuman as the other thought. My testimony was obviously the climax of the hearings; after it was over, I knew that I'd done well. A lawyer in the audience came up to me afterwards and asked if he could hire me as a witness in another case! I took it as a great compliment.

Pittsburgh is a big city, but – without wishing to hurt any feelings – it is still rather provincial. The visit of a well-known European, speaking Oxford English, meticulously dressed and, to quote the newspapers, 'with white hair on a small elegant head', was a 'show worth the detour'!

Before flying back to Paris, still keyed up by my appearance in court, I was guest of honour at a luncheon given by the Jewish community of Pittsburgh.

We had to wait three months for the decision: we won.

On 10 December 1975, the takeover was concluded: we acquired two-thirds of the capital of Copperweld for 80 million dollars. In the meantime, public opinion had shifted to our side and Copperweld's management was willing to co-operate. Philip Smith became a director of IMETAL, and a friendly relationship ensued. He resigned later on, due to tensions within his own staff; never was there any conflict of interest between IMETAL and its American subsidiary. He was succeeded by Anthony Bryan, who ran the company with efficiency and tact. He has weathered the slump and maintains an optimistic outlook.

After this major takeover, IMETAL also acquired 25 per cent of Lead Industries Group, an English company dealing among other things in lead and zinc. In France, we acquired practically the entire capital of the largest private producer of uranium, which we had been instrumental in creating years before.

What was the final balance of those hectic twenty years?

Pennaroya was either the first or second world producer of lead; SLN the second, on a par with Falkenbridge. MINEMET, the commercial branch, built an efficient international organization, and its research centre near Paris is reputed for its technical and industrial creativity. In 1980, notwithstanding a loss for SLN, IMETAL recorded a consolidated profit of 200 million francs, 25 to 30 francs per share.

The world situation of nickel has taken a most unfavourable turn, with nobody having foreseen it as far as I know. In our case, as French producers, the principal cause of losses was the decline in the value of the dollar during the decade between 1970 and 1980. IMETAL thus suffered all the ups and downs of the particularly cyclical raw material industry, aggravated by a recession in the nickel sector, which had been so long considered the crown jewel.

When I retired in 1979, the shareholders had not yet benefited as I'd hoped from our endeavours and achievements, among which Copperweld was outstanding, its dollar value having doubled within six years. This business, with which I was closely associated until my retirement, was the one from which I derived the greatest satisfaction. It was conceived and managed completely outside the bank; among my responsibilities, it was a field apart, due to its intrinsic nature, but also to the different group of people with whom I worked. In spite of the essential weakness of an industry based on non-ferrous metals, I was proud of having achieved what I did for the rue Laffitte. The Compagnie du Nord, with 20 per cent of the capital, was by far the largest individual shareholder in this multi-national mining company.

As I was finishing the chapter in 1982, the impact of the world depression in base metals had become so far-reaching that one could wonder if businesses of that kind would manage to survive. Today I find it doubly sad to see IMETAL now government-controlled, staggering under the weight of the slump.

All that remains for me is the remembrance of our efforts, our difficulties, our dreams . . .

CHAPTER

14

Blue and Yellow Silks

As far back as I can remember, I can hear the sound of galloping hooves.

I recall visiting Meautry, the family stud near Deauville, when I was very small. The sight of an attendant holding a mare with one hand and a foal a few weeks old with the other, is even more familiar to me than my first teddy bear. From the time I was old enough to talk and understand, I've heard endless discussions about the various possible matings between mares and stallions.

So when my father died and it was my turn to assume the responsibility of the family stud, I was on familiar ground, although really ignorant of what a stable with a prestigious reputation, whose racing colours were among the oldest in France, involved.

My father owned some eighty brood mares and had ninety horses in training, mostly two- and three-year olds, but a few that were four. He'd won the Prix de Diane five times, the Arc de Triomphe twice (with Eclair au Chocolat and Brantôme*), but never the Prix du Jockey Club, which is the French Derby. Brantôme had inherited the role of leading stallion at Meautry from such renowned predecessors as Sans Souci and La Farina.

My enthusiasm for golf had kept me away from the racecourse, and I'd been only vaguely interested in horses. But the time had come to make a choice. However, it would need more than a respect for family tradition to woo me away from an active sport; racing would have to bring me as much satisfaction as golf, and provide the same thrill that my very first horse had given me.

It was in September 1930. Summer was coming to an end. I'd finished my studies and was spending my last days of freedom at Chantilly before being inducted into the army for my military service. I spent the afternoons playing golf, but in the mornings I'd go to 'Les Aigles', the training grounds a few hundred yards from the family manor, to watch my father's horses work out under the supervision of 'the maestro', Lucien

* 'The Champion of the half-century.'

Robert. My eye kept coming back to a rather small, compact two-year-old colt. His name was Ilex, and he was considered mediocre, but I couldn't help liking him. Trusting in my lucky stars (or perhaps motivated by the superb innocence of youth), I asked my father to give him to me. Amused by the idea and as happy as could be to see me share his passion at last, he was only too willing to do so.

The cadet training course at Saumur kept me busy all winter far from Chantilly; when it was over I was given, along with the rank of second lieutenant, a ten-day leave. This happened to coincide with the opening of the racing season, and Lucien Robert informed me that 'my colt' would have his first run two days later at Le Tremblay, a charming small racecourse on the outskirts of Paris (which has since disappeared). My mother went with me. In fact, she practically held my hand.

My colours were those of my father in his youth: blue and yellow hoops, yellow cap. There were twenty horses entered in the race. Ilex, considered hardly in the running, started at odds of 18 to 1, and to the general surprise, he won. My mother beamed, and I felt as if I'd passed another examination – with honours.

Then came the garrison life of a young officer at Pontoise, instructing the recruits, long riding sessions, and the officers' mess with its traditional rites. I forgot all about Ilex, who ran twice again, unplaced. Nevertheless, in July I entered him in a semi-classic race, the Prix Eugène Adam, which at the time was run at Maisons-Laffitte. Because it was a Sunday, I was able to attend; this time it was my father who accompanied me. The favourite was Parsee, who had also been one of the favourites in the French Derby but had failed to stay the course. Halfway up the straight, Parsee was in the lead; then Ilex accelerated and beat him by a comfortable margin. I was elated.

As we drove home, I said to my father: 'If you had kept Ilex, you wouldn't have won that race.'

'Why not?' he asked.

'Because you'd never have thought of entering him in it.'

He didn't reply, but smiled thoughtfully.

When I made my first appearance at Longchamp as a new owner in the autumn of 1949, I felt intimidated and inexperienced, as if I were entering a new life. My colours were to appear in a 'classic' race, the Prix Royal Oak, a long-distance event in which I'd engaged two horses: Violoncelle, who had had some previous 'useful' performances and was my first choice; and his stable-mate Ciel Etoilé, who was there to make the running. He did it so well that in the straight, when he was expected to fall back, he kept going all the faster and was first past the winning post. For an initial

attempt, I'd hit the bull's eye! I saw in this victory a sign of destiny, and the winter recess seemed interminable.

But the spring season started with a disappointment. Ocarina, who seemed to be our best colt, fell lame and was unable to run until July. Fortunately, other colts turned out well and won several medium-class races, and so did the two older horses still in training, Violoncelle and Ciel Etoilé. The latter subsequently won the Prix de Cadran at Longchamp, the two-and-a-half-mile long-distance championship. The blue and yellow silks were gaining popular support and were offering serious competition to the orange and grey cap of Marcel Boussac, who was then at the peak of his racing success. Among the three-year-olds, two colts stood out from the rest: Alizier and Vieux Manoir, a son of the famous Brantôme.

Alizier should have run in the French Derby, but for some unknown reason his entrance registration had been forgotten. Vieux Manoir was entered in the Epsom Derby as I simply couldn't resist trying my luck in this supreme event. Dressed in the traditional top hat and tails, I made my first acquaintance with the most difficult racecourse in Europe, with its tremendous crowd and its atmosphere of a most impressive country fair.

Race meetings in France and in England are, in fact, quite different. In England, the crowd is much larger and the total betting, mainly with bookmakers, is also far greater. The Epsom course, on the side of a slope, is world-renowned for its difficult profile: starting uphill, then down for the famous sharp turn at Tattenham Corner, after which there is an extremely long straight that slopes gently down and finishes uphill. The English take a greater interest in the horses themselves than do the French, observing them with a very knowledgeable eye. To win a race in England isn't easy, and to do so provides an extraordinary thrill – in spite of the apparent indifference with which the English greet the winner.

Vieux Manoir made a good start, went well uphill, but fell back at the downhill turn and finished unplaced. We learned too late that the sharp Epsom track did not suit him.

The spring season was coming to an end, and in spite of the various successes I've mentioned, having grown ambitious, I was disappointed. There remained the Grand Prix de Paris, whose prestige at that time was enormous. Three thousand metres long, it was a supreme test of stamina, a quality which was far more appreciated then than it is today, when middle-distance races of 1,600 to 2,000 metres are most in favour. My colours were carried by Alizier, who had been unbeaten that year (although only in minor events), and Vieux Manoir. The stable jockey, Jean Laumain, chose to ride Alizier, and Freddy Palmer, who had won on Ciel Etoilé the year before, was engaged to ride Vieux Manoir.

Soon after the start, Alizier took the lead and, since nobody tried to set a

faster pace, Laumain kept him going. All the way round and up the hill there was no major change, but downhill Vieux Manoir, well placed till then, fell back, and it looked as if it was going to be a repeat of his performance at Epsom. So I gave him up to concentrate on Alizier, who stayed in the lead through the last bend. Attacked in the straight, he fought off all challengers, and my hopes were rising fast. Suddenly there appeared from nowhere a horse that was literally gobbling up the whole field, and my heart sank. Defeat was inevitable. Then, in a flash, I took a closer look at the intruder and, to my amazement, recognized Vieux Manoir. Before I had time to realize what was happening, he had won by four lengths. Alizier was second, having resisted all the others till the end. A triumphant ovation greeted the winning team which, hat in hand, I led back to the enclosure, glowing with pleasure. Less happy, undoubtedly, was Jean Laumain, whose experience served to confirm the racecourse legend that if the Rothschild stable has two horses entered in a race, the stable jockey is sure to choose the wrong one.

The following Sunday, Ocarina, sound at last, won the Grand Prix de St Cloud at a canter; and in August, Alizier had no trouble at all in winning the Grand Prix de Deauville. In the autumn, Violoncelle confirmed his earlier good performance and won what is now called the Prix du Conseil de Paris (Group II).

In only six months, the Rothschild stable, plundered by the Nazis, had made the most fantastic comeback! It was top of the list at the end of the year in front of Marcel Boussac's, which had dominated the French turf for twenty years. In one season, I had accumulated a rarely achieved number of classic victories, any one of which would have been enough to make an owner proud.

It is said that in the racing game beginner's luck is often followed by a period of purgatory. Such was the case with me. Vieux Manoir had proved to be unsuited to Epsom, and now Ciel Etoilé met misfortune in the Gold Cup at Ascot. At the time, there was no security system on English racecourses, and he was 'got at' (maliciously and harmfully drugged). Wildly overexcited at the start, he collapsed halfway and finished last by several hundred yards. As for Vieux Manoir, he ran at Doncaster in September in the St Leger and was the favourite. But the interminable straight, more than half a mile long, proved too much for his jockey's patience; he drew out two furlongs too soon and was beaten by a Boussac horse that was ridden with greater restraint. Shortly thereafter, a tendon gave way during training and his racing days were over. Alizier replaced him in the Arc de Triomphe and finished second, beaten by Tantième.

Vieux Manoir stood at stud at Meautry and became famous as a sire of sires, his sons including Val de Loir, Mourne and Le Haar; one of his

daughters became the dam of All Along, the crack four-year-old mare who won the four greatest races of France and the United States in the autumn of 1983 and was named America's Horse of the Year. Inevitably, Vieux Manoir's breeding career also came to an end, whereupon he spent his remaining years in retirement in a paddock bordering the road from Paris to Deauville, where countless admirers stopped on their way to give him lumps of sugar and chocolate éclairs. When he died in 1981 at the venerable age of thirty-four, the newspapers carried long obituaries recounting his most famous victories. 'In the final analysis' (and in my own mind and heart) 'Vieux Manoir was much more than just a horse . . . '

The years that followed the triumphs of 1950 were in no way comparable, but instead were filled with difficulties and disappointments. A few anecdotes serve to illustrate the variety and unpredictability of everything concerned with the 'glorious uncertainty of the turf'.

Among other problems, I had to get the Minister of Agriculture to rescind a ruling that had been obtained by Marcel Boussac, and which was most harmful to French breeding. The horses born in Germany during the war were relegated to 'Section A' of the French stud book, which cast a doubt as to the authenticity of their pedigrees. Their value was consequently downgraded, causing a permanent loss to all the studs, like my own, whose mares had been 'deported' by the Germans. (Boussac himself had lost only two mares during the Occupation.) I was inexcusably slow in discovering that the British had adopted no such ruling; but once I did, I immediately imported a thoroughbred German mare, unqualified for the French stud book, into Ireland, where she was duly registered without the slightest problem. I then brought her into France, whereupon the administration overnight dropped their previous ruling, which had thus been shown up as an obviously discriminatory measure. Marcel Boussac, incidentally, never held it against me for defeating his protectionist move: in fact, our relations became increasingly cordial as time went on.

In 1953, a group of my yearling fillies was galloping all out in a long straight paddock at Meautry. For some strange reason, the filly in the lead failed to stop when they reached the triple bar cement fence, and ran headlong into it. The horrified grooms who were present prepared to pick her up in little pieces, but it was the fence that was shattered, and Dictaway (for that was her name) was miraculously uninjured. Two years later, she won the French 1,000 Guineas and later, at stud, gave birth to Diatome, who won the Washington, DC International, among other races, and was considered one of the best colts of an exceptional generation, dominated by the legendary Sea Bird.

The year in which Dictaway won her encounter with the fence, I had a good mare called Flute Enchantée. She was boxed in during the French

Oaks and never got clear, but she came second in the Grand Prix de Paris, after entering the straight twenty lengths behind the leader. In the summer, she won the Grand Prix de Deauville by such a margin that it was impossible to find a photo of her finish which also showed the runner-up! I thought that, thanks to her, I had for the first time a really good chance in the Arc de Triomphe. But once again, a tendon gave way and she never raced again. At stud, she gave birth to many top-class performers, in particular the world-famous stallion Luthier. So you see, there are times when one thinks one has a handful of aces, and then suddenly one horse falls lame, another turns sour, a third disappoints. In the racing game, nothing is more fickle than success. (But what an incomparable joy when one achieves it!)

Of all the horses I've bred at Meautry, the most prestigious is Exbury. We nicknamed him 'le petit' (the little fellow), since he measured barely 15.2 hands at the withers. But what a big heart he had within his relatively small body and behind his calm and modest manners! As a two-year-old, he 'showed something', but no more. At three, he won the Prix Daru Group II, finished third in the French Derby and second to Match in the Grand Prix de St Cloud. The following year, with Deforge the new stable jockey, Exbury was unbeaten, winning four top-class races, including the Coronation Cup at Epsom. When the day arrived for the Arc de Triomphe, the 'test of tests', the veritable world championship of thoroughbred racing, his entire reputation was at stake. If he won, he'd be the undisputed 'Horse of the Year'.

A rainstorm the day before made us fear that a mile and a half of heavy going would be too much for him. Moreover, with an unusually large number of runners in the field, there was a risk that Deforge, who liked to wait behind, would be unable to find a clear run in the straight. The favourite was Relko, trained by François Mathet, who had cantered away with the Epsom Derby with disconcerting ease. Despite the presence of many other first-class competitors, such as Sanctus, winner of the French Derby and the Grand Prix de Paris, everyone expected to see a titanic struggle between Relko and Exbury.

Squeezed together among the friends that filled our box, Marie-Hélène and I awaited the start, tense with anxiety, our hearts beating like mad. The field broke fast and compact, with Tang, our lead horse, in front. Coming into the straight, when some of the horses were already drawing out, Deforge was hampered at first in his effort to get clear. But then began one of those spectacular, thrilling comebacks which one can never be sure of lasting till the finishing post. We were screaming our heads off, and Marie-Hélène was leaning so far over the front of our box that she had to be held back to prevent her from falling out; while Leon Zitrone, the

television commentator, was weeping with emotion.

The winner was greeted deliriously. His reputation was such that the British racing paper *Sporting Life* headlined the next morning: EXBURY REIGNS SUPREME. It was also front-page news in France, where Maurice Bernadet, the talented French racing commentator, wrote the horse's 'autobiography', starting with the words: 'I, Exbury de Rothschild'!

The glamour of a great horse sometimes reflects on his owner. One month after Exbury's triumph in the Arc, my picture appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine*. Actually, this honour was due to the rebirth of our bank and to our association with Prime Minister Georges Pompidou; but I liked to think that Exbury had something to do with it too, and had thus been willing to share some of his glory with me.

The passion that binds together dedicated horse breeders can lead to unexpected encounters. Four years after Exbury's triumph, Queen Elizabeth II, during a tour of Normandy stud farms, honoured us with a visit to Meautry, where she stayed for lunch. A very capable breeder, she knows just about all there is to know about the game. All the inhabitants of the village were on their rooftops to watch the Queen of England walk across the main paddock towards the stables to have a look at our breeding stock. We were very proud of having kept away all photographers, at her request. But we forgot about long-distance lenses!

In 1965, I entered two horses, Céladon and Free Ride, at the Royal Meeting of Ascot, and both of them seemed to have a good chance of winning their respective races. But four days before the meeting, their names did not appear on the list of horses 'still entered'. The letter of confirmation had taken a full week to cover the distance of little over 200 miles between Chantilly and London, and had arrived after the closing date. There was nothing to be done except to cancel the trip.

The following year, the same Céladon, now five years old, was again entered in the Gold Cup – well in advance! Going to Ascot is not a simple matter. From London Airport, one has to take an interminable series of narrow, twisting roads that pass through numerous suburban villages in the midst of heavy holiday traffic. Marie-Hélène and I arrived that day in a torrential rainstorm, which did not, however, dismay us, since heavy going was just what suited Céladon best. When it was time for the first race, nothing happened. After a long wait, it was announced that the meeting was cancelled, a practically unique occurrence in the history of English racing. The racecourse emptied in a flash, and we inched back to the airport through one of the worst traffic jams that I have ever seen. We missed our plane, and finally got back to Paris dispirited and frustrated, twelve hours after we had left. That same afternoon, my three-year-old

colt White Label won a good race at Longchamp, but was disqualified for interfering. It was obviously not our lucky day!

Two weeks later, I entered two horses in the Grand Prix de Paris, including White Label; but after thinking it over, I decided he was not quite good enough for the event and so withdrew him. The next day the stewards asked me to reverse my decision because there was a sweepstake on the race and they had insufficient runners. I did – and he won! This stroke of luck made up for my recent misfortunes. I even received a present of two cases of White Label whisky from the dealer.

As can be seen, England is not lucky for me, even though I've won the Coronation Cup twice and the Eclipse Stakes once. But in the 1959 Epsom Derby, my horse Shantung was kicked at the start and his jockey, Palmer, thinking the horse might have been hurt, let him drop into last place. Coming into the straight, Shantung recovered, sprinted past the field and finished third. Many spectators thought he should have won. Then the next year, in the Oaks at Epsom, Shantung's half-sister Imberline was battling up the straight against Never Too Late (who had won the 1,000 Guineas) and was gaining on her rival. Alas, her jockey hadn't noticed that the leading filly, just in front of him, was dropping back. Fifty yards from the winning post, he had to pull up short in order to avoid a collision, and finally finished third behind (faint consolation) two other French fillies.

The British cheer loudly when one of their horses wins at Longchamp or Chantilly, but at home their famous reserve returns, and apart from some discreet applause, the winner is greeted back in surprising silence. During the incident which cost Imberline a win in the Oaks, Marie-Hélène exploded so loudly that my English cousin, Evelyn de Rothschild, feared that our family would be discredited forever in the eyes of British racegoers.

In 1977, I had several good horses, among them Lightning, unbeaten winner of five excellent races. We decided to run him in the Benson & Hedges Gold Cup at York in August. Ridden by Yves St Martin, he took a good start in typical St Martin style, but after a few yards fell back and finished unplaced. His uncharacteristic behaviour made us think at first that he'd been drugged. Then we remembered that he was a 'cribber', although this had never affected his racing performances before. It must have been during the plane trip from France that he had filled his stomach with air and thus arrived completely out of form. Unfortunately, his bad habit only got worse, and after one more unsuccessful racing try, we had to give up. A pity, because he was a good horse.

For thirty years Geoff Watson was a remarkable trainer for us, especially of fillies. He won the French Oaks five times: once for my brother-in-law

Teddy Van Zuylen, and three times for me. Two years after we parted company, all our horses (as well as those owned by Marie-Hélène's brother and by our friend Alexis de Redé) went to François Mathet, who, alas, died suddenly seven years later in 1983. He was born on the same day as me, but one year earlier, and every 21st of May we used to exchange birthday greetings in verse. While he had a tremendous reputation and an impressive record, the question was: could he overcome the jinx that had haunted my grandfather, my father and myself ever since 1890, thwarting all our efforts to win a Derby?

Among my several good horses in 1977, I had Crystal Palace, from one of Meautry's best lines, that of Vieille Maison. His dam, Hermières, had won the French Oaks in 1961, but had not yet produced at stud anything really worthy of her. In the Group I Prix Lupin at Longchamp, three weeks before the Derby, Crystal Palace, boxed in on the rails, pulled out too late and finished second, but with speed to spare. It seemed to prove that once again I had a runner in the Derby with a good chance to win.

For thirty years it had been one disappointment after another: in 1962 Exbury was bumped; in 1968 Luthier couldn't stay the course; in 1969 Deforge got boxed in with Djakao; Diatome finished only second and Marriacci third. Our bad luck in the French Derby had become a legend. Now, in 1977, Crystal Palace, our horse, was the favourite. *France Soir*, the evening newspaper, carried the headline: ALLEZ ROTHSCHILD! I even received anonymous letters from turf fans, including one that said: 'This old racing fan ardently hopes that *our* beloved blue and yellow silks will finally win the Prix du Jockey Club. Why not? Conditions have never been better for *us*, and it would make everyone so happy!'

We had also entered a leader in the race: Concertino, a useful horse. Crystal Palace followed him as planned, and in the straight they were neck and neck. Crystal Palace began to draw ahead when, a furlong from home, Artaius, ridden by Lester Piggott, made a late challenge that seemed fatal to our hopes and almost stopped my heart from beating. Then, during the last few strides, Crystal Palace pulled ahead and won by half a length. Concertino was third. What a thrill and such rejoicing! The racing fans cheered the end of our bad luck, and the next day *Paris Turf* carried the headline: 150 SECONDS WIPE OUT 87 YEARS; while *France-Soir* went so far as to print: JUSTICE IS DONE!

At this point I'd like to pay tribute to the trainers and jockeys whose role in racing is indispensable, but often misunderstood.

The art of training horses is based first of all on an infinite number of technical details; but professional technique is not enough. A trainer must also possess, in addition to his love of horses, an intuition or 'feel', because

there is no universally effective training programme; it must be made to measure for each individual. Neither is it enough to be able to evaluate a horse's possibilities, nor even to know how to bring him progressively into the peak of form on the day of the race. The trainer also has to select the most appropriate races to enter him in. François Mathet was a past master of this art, and wouldn't hesitate to send a colt of modest talents to a distant provincial racecourse in order to run – and win – some small event.

The trainer also has the responsibility of selecting and directing a large staff, considering the advice of veterinary surgeons, and above all, supervising the condition of the horses in his care: their feed, health, legs, rate of development, idiosyncracies, temperament and talents. He also has to be a good diplomat, especially when dealing with inferior horses, because owners generally remain loyal when all goes well, but become upset when results are disappointing, often harbouring the illusion that all it takes to put things right again is to change the trainer.

The riding tactics of jockeys are endlessly discussed, but few people realize that they have to perform under conditions of great physical stress. Most races are run at an average speed of over 36 miles per hour, and the jockey has to be able to distinguish between a speed of 35 or 37 m.p.h. Moreover, racehorses can pull very hard, with a force of some 150 pounds on each arm, which requires considerable effort and often causes aching muscles. He also needs a lot of wind. In these conditions, it isn't easy to be adroit and clever at the same time. The best jockeys finally ride by instinct, and seize, as if by automatic reflex, opportunities that less experienced riders would have missed.

Jockeys are supposed to obey the orders of the trainer who, after all, is the person most intimately familiar with the horse and its ability. But at the same time, he has to possess sufficient initiative to be able to adjust the strategy to the way in which the race is actually run. 'It's the field that gives the orders', is the way one jockey put it. And there's always the risk that his improvisation won't work out, in which case he'll get all the blame. A good jockey can win a race through strategy or skill, but he can seldom succeed with an inferior horse; whereas a bad jockey can miss many an opportunity.

One of the most impressive moments of my racing career was as a spectator, when I was dazzled by Yves St Martin's ride on Rescousse in the 1972 French Oaks. She was a very 'free' filly and had to be held back as late as possible. Unfortunately, she made a flying start, so St Martin decided it was best to stay in front, although it was contrary to the trainer's instructions. He managed to quieten and balance her, setting a false pace (a tactic in which he excels), then letting her sprint along the straight,

where he gained a few decisive lengths and won. Many other jockeys in the same circumstances would not have dared to disobey the trainer's orders and would have finished last.

The trainer and the jockey are in the limelight, their ability is the determining element of success; but it's still the owner who is the financial supporter of the enterprise: to him go the profits or losses – almost inevitably the latter, due to the enormous overheads and the relatively modest returns. One might say that the owner is the Chairman of the Board, the trainer the President of the company, and the jockey the executive in the field. The late Arpad Plesch, who owned an important racing stable, used to say that in the end it's the owner who wins the Derby, meaning that everything depends on his astuteness in selecting the right men and the right horses.

Nowadays, while there are still quite a lot of owners, very few of them run stables on the scale of those which were famous during my youth, when the names of Lord Derby, Eduardo Martinez de Hoz and Edmond Blanc were known to all, not forgetting Marcel Boussac, whose memorably successful stable was recently dispersed. The Aga Khan is practically the only individual owner to maintain a large racing operation, continuing the tradition of his father and grandfather.

A passion for racing, like all the other passions, can lure its victims to the point of extreme sacrifice. Racing is competition in its purest form, so simple and direct that its fascination is irresistible; and before one knows it, one identifies oneself with one's horse. From his box high in the stands, the owner feels transformed by some magic wand into an athlete in the stadium . . . and who has never dreamed of being one of those demi-god Olympic champions who perform seemingly impossible exploits before ecstatic crowds? Well, through his horse, an owner can feel as if he is taking off on the wings of his champion, when he flies past his rivals, hardly touching the ground, supported by the cheering crowd. The same transmutation occurs with racegoers, some of whom so identify themselves with a particular stable that they systematically back its every entry. I remember one May Sunday at Longchamp where, after a win, rather minor in itself but following several others, an excited better rushed up to congratulate me, saying: 'Ah! Monsieur le Baron, what a wonderful spring season *we* are having!'

As I've said, most racehorses are mediocre, and when an exceptional individual appears, it's such a rare event that the owner's entire life is illuminated for a time. As his horse adds one victory to another, some of the resulting prestige and fame rubs off on him. On the day of the big race, as soon as he sets foot on the racecourse people point him out, murmur his

name, look upon him as the man who is about to triumph or to fail. As starting time approaches, he can feel his blood-pressure rise, his mouth becomes dry. He observes the proceedings as in a dream, and when the horses enter the starting stalls at last, his binoculars are shaking so much that he can hardly see them. Suddenly, they're off! What a contrast to the oppressive slowness of the waiting hours! Everything happens so fast! In the confusion of colours, he seeks his own, like a sailor seeking a familiar rock in a stormy sea. Ah, there they are. But how can he be sure that all is going well? At the last bend, when the field turns to run towards the stands, the public is on its feet and he tries in vain to see through the solid mass of hats and shoulders. He can hardly breathe. Where's my horse? All of a sudden, he spots it. He's coming, he's drawing out, he's going to win! No, another horse comes up to challenge him. For fifty yards, one hundred, the suspense is at its peak: will it be victory or defeat? Finally, luck is with him; the horse's stride is unfaltering, he's in the lead, he's in front all alone; for the moment he and his horse are the centre of the universe, all else forgotten. Surprised by victory, he can't quite believe in the joy that surges in him. He leaves the stands, walking on air, to lead his horse into the paddock. He is treated like a hero, surrounded by a crush of friends and admirers. He rejoices inwardly, but outwardly contains his delight, remembers the social graces: be polite, answer questions, say thank you.

Bad days are just as depressing as good ones are exhilarating. That fleeting moment of joy is replaced by an overwhelming feeling of frustration. What went wrong? Why and how? He leaves the stands dejected, worried and lonely. Glory has changed sides. He feels almost ashamed, he'd like to explain, to justify himself. He disappears as quickly and discreetly as possible.

Become a racehorse owner if you enjoy a thrill and are not afraid to suffer. But cardiacs, beware!

The breeder's role may seem less stressful than that of the owner, trainer or jockey, but it is the most difficult of all. It begins with a study of all the theories, the 'science' of mixing blood lines, of blending the qualities of the ancestors; but the breeder still has to rely on his intuition. He arranges a mating. Some 340 days later, a foal is born, wobbly-legged and hardly giving a clue as to his future ability. Has he inherited the qualities of his dam, or the faults of his sire? The breeder observes his first year of growth, wavering between hope and doubt. The foal goes into training. The greatest promise is sometimes shown by the least likely individuals. Hopes soar. Then comes the moment of the maiden race – and he starts out from 'square one' again.

The goal of every breeder is to produce good racers, in the highest possible proportion. But statistics show that at the very best less than one horse out of ten is good, and very few of them will ever reach the top. Furthermore, out of the 38,000 thoroughbreds born each year in the United States (10,000 in Great Britain and about 3,200 in France), more than 25 per cent of them will never even make it to the racecourse. If breeding a champion were as simple a matter as mating the filly of the year to the champion stallion, thoroughbred breeders would all be multi-millionaires. As a matter of fact, experience has shown that certain crosses, though far from magic formulas, have indeed produced a high percentage of outstanding racers – although nothing proves that it isn't merely a question of luck, like a run of red or black in roulette.

Traditional breeders tend to maintain the lines that have already given them particularly good results. The Aga Khan had great success with the descendants of Mumtaz Mahal, his grandfather's 'flying filly'. Personally, I've always had a weakness for the descendants of Vieille Maison, whose offspring include Vieux Manoir, Hermières, Rescousse, Crystal Palace and others; as well as those of Aurore Boréale, which included Aurore Polaire, Ciel Etoilé, l'Astrologue, le Géographe, Tropique, Soleil, Lightning, Skelda. Another of my favourite lines at Meautry has now died out, after having produced Ocarina, Violoncelle, Premier Violon, Flute Enchantée and Luthier. But even the seemingly surest matings are so often disappointing that breeders are forever seeking some combination of bloodlines that will produce nothing but champions.

To the breeder, equine aristocracy consists of stallions with an outstanding and consistent breeding record, proven brood mares and their close female relatives, and champion racing fillies. At the yearling auction sales, those who are 'born in the purple' as they say, bring fabulous prices, running into millions of dollars, so long as their conformation is correct. To pay so much for a youngster who may never even be judged fit to race may give the impression that breeders simply toy with millions. But the fact is that the thoroughbred breeder and owner are the only people in the horse world who are practically guaranteed a deficit every year. Nevertheless, there are people willing to bid up to these phenomenal figures, motivated by the desire to own a champion. In case of success, the horse can be syndicated for increasingly fabulous sums (although there is the risk that a good racer may turn out to be a poor sire), such as the record-breaking 36 million dollar syndication of Conquistador Cielo in 1982. Basically, these prices are due to the passion of a few wealthy amateurs competing with a few other people who hope to 'make a killing'.

The new element in racing, typical of the present age, is the trend to turn the 'sport of kings' into a commercial operation. Such is the case of

Robert Sangster, who heads a powerful syndicate that breeds and buys the most expensive yearlings, spending several million dollars every year, hoping to win the classic races in Europe and to sell the winners as stallions in the United States for enormous prices. Robert Sangster owns, in various parts of the world, some 325 horses, trained by 48 different trainers; if you include the brood mares, foals and yearlings, he must have some seven or eight hundred horses. He seems to run his business very well, considering his unprecedented exploit in 1982 of winning in the same year the Epsom Derby, the Irish Derby and the French Derby. But this still doesn't alter the fact that present-day prices for thoroughbreds have no economic foundation. They remind me of an article on kinetics I read some time ago: a stone falls down a mountainside, but if it were placed on the ground it would, notwithstanding the slope, remain immobile. So why does it fall? Answer: it falls because it falls. The same applies to horses. Stallions are expensive because their produce is expensive; but this is expensive only because the good colts will become expensive stallions. The equine dog is running after his tail. Horses are expensive because they are expensive.

But money isn't everything, not even in racing. Nature is unimpressed by the cost of an expensive mating and quite willing to reward talent or good luck. In my own case, I decided to upgrade my stock with a few sound acquisitions, rather than to launch into a costly buying spree which would have been contrary to my innate sense of moderation. I've been fortunate enough to obtain for reasonable sums the dams of Exbury, Shantung, Haltilala (winner of Group I Prix Vermeille) and La Bamba (one of the best fillies I ever owned).

Marie-Hélène and Alexis de Redé say that I'm better at buying yearlings for others than for myself. Every year they entrust me with the task of selecting a colt at the Deauville Sales for them to buy in partnership; for a while, Alexis also wanted a filly for himself. In 1970, I picked Pleben as the colt and Rescousse as the filly. Both were quite cheap. Two years later, Pleben won the Grand Prix de Paris and the French St Leger, while Rescousse won the Prix de Diane (the French Oaks) and was second in the Arc de Triomphe. One can appreciate the incredible luck involved when one considers that many large stables, despite years of endeavour, have never won any of these classics. A newspaper had a computer evaluation made of the statistical probability of buying such a miraculous pair of yearlings, and found that there is one chance in 362 million!

I will conclude this chapter with a true story that illustrates the unpredictable ups and downs in the life of every horse-lover. It is recent, but dates a

long way back; it involves the breeder and the owner; it's comical, illogical, full of hope as well as of illusion:

For twenty years I've faithfully studied the Deauville yearling sales catalogue, on the lookout for a filly or two capable of making good brood mares, after having shown sufficient ability on the racecourse. In 1964, I liked the looks of an elegant chestnut filly from one of the best Boussac lines, Moss Rose, whose sire, although not very fashionable, was, I knew, an excellent brood mare sire. Unable to attend the sale myself, I asked Marie-Hélène to replace me. I was disappointed when she told me afterwards that my trainer had faulted a leg and strongly advised against acquiring the filly. Two days later, I'd forgotten all about it when I was informed that a large package had just been delivered for me and was waiting on the doorstep. I went to have a look and, to my amazement, there was Moss Rose, with the butler holding her by her halter and her sales number still stuck onto her hindquarters. It was a belated and wonderful birthday present from Marie-Hélène.

Moss Rose turned out to be backward and mediocre. After several minor places, she finally ran at Deauville as a three-year-old. Marie-Hélène, arriving late, rushed to our box in the stands and fainted as the field was turning into the straight. Kneeling down to attend her, I raised my head only to be told of a victory I had neither seen nor heard.

At stud, Moss Rose proved barren after several unsuccessful breeding attempts. As a last resort, I sent her to Violon d'Ingres, a horse I'd bred myself and sold to Alec Weisweiller, but who was not a very popular sire. The mating resulted in the one and only foal she ever delivered, a strong filly we named 'Lady Berry', after a rare variety of English rose. Watson, the trainer, didn't think much of her. But she ran as a two-year-old on the small racecourse at Fontainebleau and, surprisingly, she won. The following year she started out the season with a win at Evry, and I began to think she must be better than we'd believed. Entered in a good race at Longchamp, she was an easy winner, but was then unplaced in the French Oaks. Afterwards, however, she won three important races in succession: at Chantilly, Deauville and Longchamp, where, in the classic French St Leger, she beat all of the colts as well as the fillies, an exploit no other filly had achieved since 1929. Finally, in the Arc, after a slow start, she made up ground magnificently and was fourth, only a head away from the third-placed runner.

She was obviously a first-class filly, but so difficult to handle in her box that whenever Watson came to saddle her, she'd try to crush him against the wall. Unlike her dam, she was a prolific brood mare, but her superb foals all inherited her bad character, not only in their stalls, but also, unfortunately, on the racecourse, where they showed evident ability, but

little competitive spirit. In 1979, she gave birth to a chestnut colt, the first son of Pharly; he struck me as being so ugly that I immediately sold the nomination I'd bought for another of my mares that year with the same sire. Marie-Hélène, who always finds wonderful names for our horses, called him 'Le Nain Jaune' (The Yellow Dwarf), which was the title of a book she liked. As he grew up, Le Nain Jaune improved a little, but François Mathet had his hands full trying to reform his bad behaviour and he didn't run until he was a three-year-old.

He started with two useful wins, better than expected, and I began to wonder whether, like his mother, he might not improve and to what extent. Two second places followed, which seemed to presage no brilliant future. All the same, we ran him in the Grand Prix de Paris of 1982. Run at a fast pace, it was a true test of stamina. Le Nain Jaune won decisively, and the public cheered our colours with enthusiasm – which was particularly heart-warming after the bitter recent experience of having the family bank nationalized.

During a luncheon party before the race, Alexis de Redé had given us all a yellow rose to wear for luck. In the winner's paddock, I slipped mine into Le Nain Jaune's halter, as a way of saying 'Thank you' to him. After the race, a friend pointed out that my last three winners of the Grand Prix de Paris had all borne names with a colour in them: White Label, Soleil Noir and Le Nain Jaune. He asked if he could look forward to seeing a 'Green Streak' or a 'Blue Ribbon'!

Racing memoirs generally end with a melancholy outlook on the future of the sport. It's undeniable that higher costs, erosion of wealth and heavier taxation give cause to question the future of the racing industry. But one must not forget the uncanny power of seduction that the horse has exercised over man for several thousand years. Breeders and owners are inspired by so much hope, so much expectation, and so much love for horses, that they cannot prevent themselves from being optimistic as well as irrational. Racing has survived so many vicissitudes that I still have hopes for the year 2000.

A racing man cannot lose faith.

CHAPTER

15

Marie-Hélène

It was at the end of August, the evening of the traditional gala that is the climax of the Deauville season. With for me something different: the 'Gala des Courses' marked my entrance with fanfare into this unusual world of racing. The Rothschild stable, which I'd taken charge of after my father's death a few years before, had got off to a new start – at a gallop! An evening otherwise very similar to others. How could I guess that it was going to completely transform my life?

I disappeared through the revolving door into the Casino in a light-hearted mood. At the top of the staircase, then as today, the apprentice jockeys, wearing the silks of the stables that had been most successful during the past year, stood at attention to greet the arriving guests: the men in black tie, the women adorned with their most elegant evening gowns and most splendid jewels.

The 'Ambassadors' room was jammed. All the racegoers who congregated at Deauville for the season, from owners of the largest stables to the most anonymous turf fan, met for this prestigious party in aid of the Jockey's Association.

Awards were presented to the leading trainer, breeder and owner. At that time there was not yet the famous 'Cravache d'Or' (Golden Whip) which is now awarded to the jockey who has won the most races throughout the year; nor was there yet a film composed of the most thrilling moments of the major national and international races during the season.

The entertainment was provided by Edith Piaf, the unforgettable cabaret star, and a Tombola, after dinner. The lucky winners were called onto the stage to receive a voucher corresponding to their prizes: a jewel, a car, a watch – and two cases of Château-Lafite which were my personal contribution to the cause.

It so happened that the winner of this last prize was a young couple whom I scarcely knew – or rather, whom I'd come across two or three times on the racecourse at Longchamp or Chantilly. I had been struck by the young blonde woman's allure.

At the end of the evening, after all the numbers had been drawn and the prizes allotted, it seemed to me only courteous to congratulate (without ulterior motive?) the young lady who had just won my Lafite.

'At last! It's about time!' she exclaimed, as I was preparing to recite my compliment.

The obvious aggression in her voice, the coldness of the look she gave me, left no room for doubt: she obviously did not share the same feelings as I. I was taken aback. Whatever had I done?

Providence – maybe only mutual friends – took us to Brummel's, the casino night-club, at the end of the evening. The young lady accepted my invitation to dance; and I knew what it was all about.

The Countess de Nicolay knew a lot about horses: her husband, along with his four brothers, was a thoroughbred breeder in the Sarthe region. She hadn't exactly appreciated my lingering look, considering it far too insistent for a well-bred gentleman, and her 'It's about time!' simply meant that instead of my unabashed display of admiration, good manners required that I should have been introduced to her first.

She said what was on her mind in a direct, straightforward manner, without the slightest reticence or sugar-coating. If I hadn't understood that I'd behaved like a perfect cad in her eyes, I'd certainly have also been a perfect fool. Her candour only added to her aura of seduction . . . I must have succeeded in effacing that unfortunate first impression, for after the Grand Prix de Deauville on the last Sunday in August, we met again at Brummel's. We danced. This time I didn't even think of staring at her; I was too preoccupied with listening to the 'little night music' playing inside my heart. She told me she was going to spend the month of September in Holland . . .

And that month of September was the longest month . . .

I took advantage of this enforced separation to learn a little more.

She was the daughter of the Baron and Baroness van Zuylen van Nyevelt, whom I had occasionally run into at various parties in Paris. A couple with whom I had had a historic link for more than a century. The van Zuylen family and my own's paths had crossed and this encounter had set off sparks. A marriage with a scent of scandal, an ancient feud perpetuated by family tradition, which one listened to vaguely like a stale old story. There had been a disagreement between the van Zuylens and the Rothschilds. I knew no more.

But soon I had unravelled the tangled threads of that mysterious alliance and reassembled the genealogies which made us relatives.

Marie-Hélène's grandfather, Etienne van Zuylen, had married a young Rothschild girl, Hélène, the daughter of Salomon de Rothschild, the

younger brother of my grandfather. Drama in both families! In the Rothschild family, one never married Catholics.* Hélène was ignored, rejected, forgotten. Her mother went into perpetual mourning, as if to demonstrate beyond a doubt that her daughter no longer existed for her. I recall having visited her as a child in her house on the rue Berryer. An old lady dressed in black, her face almost eclipsed by an abundant mass of white hair; I only remember the sweets she gave us.

I, who so often watched the spectacle on the Place de la Concorde from my window on the rue Saint-Florentin, must certainly have seen the famous carriage of Etienne van Zuylen. Founder of the Automobile Club, located on the very same Place de la Concorde, he used to drive there in his impressive turn-out of four matched pairs of horses, holding the reins in his own hands.

The van Zuylens had been deeply offended by the treatment they'd received. They could, after all, trace their lineage back to the Colonnas, an ancient aristocratic Italian family that had emigrated to Holland in the 11th century after a quarrel with the Pope. And here were the Rothschilds, a family with only a century behind them, who dared to be choosy! On their side too, the breach was permanent. Eighty years had passed. The quarrel had become a fact of history: the van Zuylens didn't care for the Rothschilds, and the Rothschilds preferred to take no notice of them.

Nevertheless, I'd met Marie-Hélène's father and mother. She, a beautiful, elegant, slender woman, observed me with an ironic smile when I bowed to her. He, an unusual individual, the essence of refinement, with a lithe, long body and a remarkable face set on a long neck. His chiselled features, his thick mane of pepper-and-salt hair combed back from his forehead, his handsome straight nose, thick eyebrows, monocle in the eye, his mouth with well-designed lips and two vertical furrows on either side, made him the very image of the elegant, aloof aristocrat, but with an indescribable air of acuity, asceticism, an air of Christ . . .

Soon these persons once vaguely encountered had become old acquaintances. I knew their history before history brought them back into my family, this time for a reconciliation I hoped would last forever, because . . . you must have guessed . . . But let's not anticipate.

Egmont van Zuylen, although of Dutch origin, was a diplomat in the service of the King of Belgium, posted in Cairo, when he met the very

* Of 18 marriages in the generation of 'old Mayer's' grandchildren, 16 were between cousins (Anka Muhlstein: *James de Rothschild*, Gallimard, 1981). In fact, one of James's nieces had already married an Englishman, which made the old patriarch furious. He wrote to his nephew Nathaniel: 'This marriage makes me literally sick . . . it has hurt the pride of the entire family . . . we must forget it, erase it from our memory.'

beautiful Marguerite Nametalla, 'Maggie' to her friends, and fell madly in love with her. He was engaged then to a princess, but preferring Egyptian blood to the royal variety, he broke off his engagement in order to marry the lady of his heart from the banks of the Nile. Another drama, one generation later. The family could not do less than cut off financial support. The couple left for America, where Marie-Hélène was born, the first of three children.

Maggie had an exceptional personality. Witty and gay, lively and provocative, she combined audacity and fantasy. Completely natural and devoid of timidity, her sense of humour, her taste for coining phrases, her repartee, her gift for imitation, made her seem like a character in a play. Intelligent (Malraux said of her: 'Hers is intelligence in its purest state, since it is unencumbered by any intellectual baggage'), Maggie could participate in any discussion for, while conscious of her lack of culture, she never gave it a second thought. She once smilingly proposed an unusual bargain to Georges Pompidou: 'Half my fortune for half your culture!' She fascinated everyone who met her by her irony, that gift for accepting cares light-heartedly and giving a humorous twist to sad stories. Heedless of convention, she chose her friends from the most varied spheres: Pompidou and Malraux, Visconti and Onassis, Serge Lifar, Coco Chanel and Maria Callas were among those closest to her.

She liked to dramatize her unwealthy origins by describing in great detail, and with the oriental accent that added spice to her anecdotes, her self-styled 'impoverished' childhood. 'In our family,' I once heard her say, 'we're always buried standing up. It's cheaper and it takes less room!'

She had lived through all sorts of droll experiences, from which she wove delightful little comedies: her marriage having been indefinitely postponed by her parents-in-law, she found herself pregnant too soon. In order to conceal this unfortunate state of affairs from respectable New York society, she decided to postpone the official birth of her baby until the proper time. So she kept the actual event a secret, and continued her normal social life (as well as her now fictitious pregnancy) thanks to a clever arrangement of pillows that gave her the shape of a mother-to-be. One evening, during a formal Embassy dinner, the pillows slipped and fell to the floor, to the stupefaction of everyone present. She was the first to laugh, and the least embarrassed by it all.

During their first years of marriage, the young couple, penniless and unaided by the family, had difficulty making both ends meet. Nevertheless, they lived at the Waldorf-Astoria, a luxury New York hotel. One day when Maggie had gambled away the little money she had left and was feeling doubly ravenous due to the baby she was carrying, she ordered a huge plate of spaghetti from the Italian room service waiter. She devoured

most of it and still felt starved. Suddenly she had a brilliant idea. She caught a fly, squashed it in the pasta, and rang for the waiter.

'*Guardate questo! Che orrore!*' she cried in mock disgust, ordering immediately a steak in replacement. It was served to her.

Next day, same scenario; only this time the waiter, who was nobody's fool, said with a conspiratorial wink: '*Ho capito*'. Like all true Italians, he appreciated the '*combinazione*'; perhaps, too, he was kind-hearted: every day thereafter, Maggie was given the left-overs from the pantry . . . and Marie-Hélène was a bouncing baby!

Nothing in Maggie's outward appearance evoked her oriental origin. She was fair-skinned with sparkling green eyes, and a mischievous expression that revealed her love of laughter and her sense of humour.

She tried to learn how to play golf. Her instructor demonstrated the correct swing at great length. She watched with little interest, then all at once impulsively grabbed a club and hit the ball – miraculously driving it right onto the green! The pro then wanted to show her how to putt the ball into the hole, whereupon she exclaimed: 'But why didn't you tell me before? I'd have done it with my first stroke!'

Her only enemy was boredom. But she thought it was the most abundant thing in the world. When people ceased to amuse her, she sought the company of the little group of intimate friends she had chosen for herself.

Maggie and Egmont formed a striking couple, partly due to their elegance, but also to some indefinable and unexpected quality, something subtle and rare. And yet Egmont, son of the 'black sheep of the family', Hélène, seemed to be the man least likely to live in harmony with this bubble of a woman, so carefree and frivolous. While he was contemplative and absent-minded, she was active and alert; while her charm had an almost provocative element, his emanated naturally from his innate courtesy.

She was a will-o'-the-wisp, a butterfly; he was Don Quixote, in aspect as well as in his penchant for defending lost causes. She was born of laughter, always ready to fly off on a gust of wind; he was a serious gentleman, always ready to set forth on a crusade. A highly cultured person (he had founded a literary magazine in New York for the French-speaking residents of the city), he loved books and discussions; she, only fun and gambling. He had a passion for golf and horses; she had never practised any sport. He was interested in ideas and politics; she, in people and words. While both were intelligent, he was the intellectual, while she was the flash of light that illuminated the slightest event.

This noble gentleman – noble in heart as well as in appearance – always behaved with simplicity and modesty. He'd lose his serene reserve only

when, during a conversation, friends or ideas dear to him were being attacked.

His absent-mindedness could play tricks on him. Once I was sitting next to him during the funeral service for a mutual friend. Egmont suddenly rose and began to practise his golf swing, completely forgetting that we were in church! Another time, undoubtedly delayed by some disagreement, he entered the room to preside over his Board of Directors, carrying the telephone book under his arm instead of his business dossiers.

This gentle poet was, of course, tender-hearted, forgetful of himself because he thought only of others, exquisitely courteous, and unfailingly generous. He was so fond of his horses that he was unable to recognize their limitations. At the start of every season, he was convinced he owned the Horse of the Year. And when it came time to sell one of them, he couldn't bear to do it, for fear that the horse might be maltreated.

Towards the end of the last century, Egmont's father had reconstructed an immense medieval-style castle on the ruins of the family château in Holland. To do so, he hadn't hesitated to shift the entire village several hundred yards back! Built of brick, surrounded by a moat, in the middle of a park planted with trees a hundred years old, dotted with lakes and crossed with canals, this Gothic edifice, with its towers and dungeon, its crenelations and gargoyles, was a perfect blend of the extravagance of the 'Années Folles' and the romanticism of the Dark Ages.

To reach the château, one has to cross over a drawbridge, pass through an enormous wrought-iron gate, whereupon one finds oneself in – a cathedral! Veritable pillars, a vaulted ceiling soaring almost out of sight, medieval statues, armour, weapons, hangings, tapestries, galleries running around the upper storey. On the ground floor, a series of Gothic reception rooms, a vast oak-panelled dining room overlooking the moat, alcoves dipping into the water as if to protect from ghosts the soldiers of the watch. Narrow, twisting staircases lead to the upper floors, where there is a succession of bedrooms, each one as spacious as an armoury. Wooden bridges lead from one tower to another, and when one strolls there after nightfall, bats brush silently past. The bathrooms are equipped with tubs as deep as tombs. Only lacking are ghosts rattling their chains.

There every year during the whole month of September, Egmont and Maggie entertained their guests. It was a month of perpetual fireworks: at times, the glitter of sparkling wit; at others, the rumbling thunder and lightning of political discussions, as a world of friends from the most diverse horizons gathered there on that occasion. Carefree millionaires, bohemian artists; aristocrats of ancient lineage, ambitious young politicians; noble Spanish grandees, democratic Swiss; descendants of Tsarist

Russia, rising stars of literature; revolutionary idealists, conservative capitalists; Greek shipowners, opera queens, steel kings, tin kings . . .

And so the month passed by, stimulating, amusing, exciting. Some spent the evenings playing cards: poker players with their enigmatic expressions next to quiet gin rummy players. The sports enthusiasts retired early to be able to play golf or ride horses. The poets preferred to visit museums or amble along the Amsterdam canals, while the dedicated defenders of causes engaged in verbal jousts no less spirited than actual combat. Egmont sometimes lost his habitual serenity; he'd even leap over a table in order to bring his argument closer to his opponent, while Maggie never looked up from her cards.

Once only did she consent to abstain from gambling during the evening. She had made a promise: François de Nicolay, her daughter's fiancé, was spending a few days at the castle in order to become better acquainted with his future family. François arrived at the end of the afternoon, the card tables had been carefully removed from sight. He had tea and chatted politely. Everything was going well. He was shown to his room. Hardly had he disappeared upstairs, when Maggie persuaded some kind soul to give her 'just one little game'. But when François returned, Maggie had completely forgotten her good resolution! She beckoned to him, 'Come here, my dearrrr' (she rolled her R's like all Orientals), 'you are so nice! Sit down behind me, you will bring me luck!' And thus poor François spent his first night in the château obediently stationed behind his future mother-in-law.

Nevertheless, a few months later, in the most romantic setting ever created beneath the skies of Holland – the chapel of the château, surrounded by water and submerged in flowers – the wedding took place.

The van Zuylens, in short, were of a very special breed. You had to know them not to be put off.

They were capable of quarrelling with seemingly unforgivable violence; but just when one expected to see them part forever, they resumed as if nothing had been said, somebody bid 'four spades' and the bridge game continued peacefully until the next storm broke.

Egmont and Maggie are no more, having disappeared prematurely. Their son Teddy, his wife Gabrielle and their four daughters, Alexandra, Marina, Cordelia and Vanessa – Marie-Hélène also, still a child of the Haar – carry on the colourful tradition of that month of friendship, the tradition of another age.

At the end of that interminable month of September, Marie-Hélène returned to Paris. Horses had brought us together, and horses enabled us to meet again: October and the Arc de Triomphe, November and the final

races of the season. The winter seemed too long for us to part. Somehow we found pretexts for seeing each other.

In the spring, Longchamp allowed us to meet a little more . . . I'll recount only two horse stories, in homage to the equine gods who had taken us under their protection:

The first concerns a filly, Hurnli, which the Nicolays, who generally sold their products, had exceptionally kept in training and through courtesy registered in the personal colours of Marie-Hélène. She turned out to be good, but I couldn't see any chance for her in the Poule d'Essai for fillies – which she carried off brilliantly, beating one of my own fillies. Marie-Hélène, a few boxes away from me, was exultant. I congratulated her by politely bowing my head and raising my hat. I'm sure she guessed that for once I was happy to lose. Besides, I won the following race, the Poule d'Essai for colts, with Cobalt . . . This double success – Filly of the Year, Colt of the Year? – began to look like a complicity of fate.

At the end of the same year, Egmont asked Marie-Hélène and her husband to buy a mare for him at the Newmarket Sales in England. They brought back the mare I'd sent to the sales, who was in foal to one of my stallions, Vieux Manoir. 'Why travel so far to buy what was next door?' was Egmont's astonished comment.

The resulting foal was named Le Haar, in fitting dual tribute to a noble lineage and a stately home: never was a name so aptly chosen. Le Haar was a good horse, notably third in the French Derby; but he was above all an excellent stallion. I sent him to one of my mares, and the result of the mating was Exbury (named after one of the Rothschild estates this time). Exbury, as I've described earlier, won the Arc de Triomphe and was without a doubt the best horse I've ever bred. The Rothschild breed combined with the van Zuylen's had produced a champion.

In the meantime . . . an idyll was born. The bud of love at first sight needed several seasons before it could bloom in full daylight. As in all love stories, we had to fight and resist. We'd vowed never to see each other again . . . we parted . . .

And then one day, in spite of remorse, doubts, hesitations, suffering, all those restraints and barriers that conscience had placed between ourselves and happiness, in spite of the opposition of some and the pressure of others, we slipped away and married in America.

It was twenty-five years ago, as I write these lines.

It might begin like a romantic novel: 'Daughter of the desert sands and the fogs of Holland . . . ' But there's always something in the alchemy of souls that comes from far back. The produce of this original couple could hardly fail to be excessive, exotic, rare, flamboyant.

As a reasoning and reasonable man, I must admit that Marie-Hélène personified to me all the mirages of the Orient and the dreams of the North, even in her birth sign: Scorpio, with Scorpio ascendant!

It would be unseemly to try to paint a finished portrait of the woman I'd just wed. Merely a few brushstrokes, to give an idea . . .

Young and gay, she was the essence of life. From her mother she had inherited her green eyes, but more almond-shaped and even more luminous; from her father, the magnificent mass of hair, like a blond mane, the full mouth, prettily designed. But she owed to herself alone the complexion and radiance, the sensitivity which passed over her face in waves, as clouds move in the sky; to herself alone the impetuosity of a runaway horse, and another aspect almost feline, which purrs and the next instant bares its claws: a wild animal at liberty, half domesticated, half untamed. A fabulous appetite for life, emotions always at their height, a spontaneity with a thousand facets, as ever-changing as the sea. And charm, which defies description.

Excessive, passionate, certain words had lost their meaning to her. She knew nothing of nuance, reserve or self-control. If she accepted, it was for life; if she condemned, it was to death. For her, things were either exciting or odious, marvellous or abominable, thrilling or unbearable; people were either adorable or hateful, friends or foes, angels or monsters.

Any undertaking would mobilize all the resources of her dynamic nature. Even to people she scarcely knew, a reproof had to be expressed at all costs and in stinging terms. It was not a question of any lack of subtlety on her part, nor lack of tact; neither did she lack the discrimination to see things other than in black or white. It was simply the result of her passionate nature.

Nobody seems to have taught her that there can be half of a whole or a quarter of something; for her only totality was allowed to exist. Giving meant giving of oneself, playing tennis meant being a champion (she won seventeen tennis tournaments in America), believing in God meant becoming a nun (she entered a convent, but since she was still a minor, her parents were able to obtain her release).

There was no question of this intensity suddenly diminishing, simply because she'd married a man who was more reserved. Her behaviour remained unchanged. A good example was at the racecourse, where it is considered proper to control one's manifestations of joy or disappointment. Her conduct astonished, to say the least, particularly in England, where the distinguished gentlemen of Epsom regarded as some strange animal this owner from abroad who, far from controlling her volcanic temperament, almost fell out of her box with excitement, cheered on her horse and jockey with cries and gestures (as if they could actually hear

her!), whooped with joy or dissolved in tears.

Winning doesn't interest her; but winning over is her favourite activity. As a young girl, she had to return to Europe with her parents, which meant leaving not only America, but also her first boyfriend. How could she telephone him? She managed to make friends with the anonymous long-distance operator, and she confided her troubles to him with such a profusion of touching details that she succeeded in softening his heart. From then on, every evening at the same hour, she had a free line to New York!

Today, if she organizes a benefit, she doesn't appeal for donations to one person after another, but decides herself how much each one should contribute. And many a tight-fisted miser has found himself magically relieved of a cheque made out for an amount that only a few minutes earlier would have sent him into a state of collapse.

'*Vouloir, c'est pouvoir*,' they say in France. 'Where there's a will, there's a way.' But with Marie-Hélène, more than anybody else I know, willing is merely the first step to achievement.

A thousand examples spring to mind. As a young girl, she decided to 'earn' enough money at cards to buy a car, along with three equally impecunious friends. Playing for low stakes, but playing night and day, she managed to accumulate the price of a Chevrolet! At about the same time, Egmont challenged her to earn her own living. She resolved to obtain lucrative advertising contracts for her father's literary review, *La Pensée Française*. Needless to say, the advertising managers she contacted almost laughed in her face. Little did they know her! She decided to bypass the saints and go to God himself. If a door was shut in her face, she slipped in through the window, with such persistence that she wore down the resistance of the Presidents of such companies as General Motors and Chesterfield, who finally let themselves be convinced of the honour or interest they had in advertising in a French magazine . . . read by a few hundred impoverished intellectuals!

I too ended up by yielding to this force of persuasion, or rather, by making use of this gift. If I wished to syndicate a stallion, for example, and mentioned the price I'd set, she'd begin by flying into a rage: I'd never change, always undervaluing everything I did or produced . . . Then she'd take matters into her own hands, decide on a 'reasonable' price – in a field where everything is, by definition, subjective, since it concerns a gamble on the future! Her estimation was always so far removed from mine that I'd tremble at the thought of seeing the transaction come to naught. But, needless to say, she'd succeed in finding the effective arguments . . . and the buyers. I had 'lost', while she had pulled off a master stroke! How many times have I seen the same scenario.

She might have her own secret: the absolute refusal to accept defeat. 'Giving up' is another phrase that was never part of her vocabulary. Recently, one of her friends of modest means decided to live in the country and sold his Paris apartment. He'd set his heart on an abandoned property, admirably situated on top of a hill in Normandy. The view stretched as far as one could see on two sides, while the foreground was equally charming, with orchards and meadows dotted with apple trees, like a series of little primitive paintings. Love at first sight! He consulted the local *notaire*.

'Nothing doing, Monsieur. Ten buyers have already approached me, prepared to pay any price. But the house is part of an inheritance dating back to seven years ago, and it's impossible to settle the estate because the heirs, five brothers and sisters, have not been on speaking terms since their parents died.'

Like anyone else, the friend accepted the refusal with resignation and left empty-handed, except for his regret. Marie-Hélène then appeared on the scene. She succeeded in finding out the names and addresses of all the members of the family. And she went into battle. Using a false name, she telephoned the heirs, who hung up on her. She renewed her attempts. She found a chink in their armour and, one thing leading to another via the telephone, she wormed her way into the family.

At this point, she embarked on a veritable telephonic psychoanalysis, almost an unlicensed practice of medicine. Each one told her his side of the story, his childhood secrets, his version of the family dramas; each one unburdened his heart to her, accusing the others of unpardonable crimes. Still anonymous, she became a confidante, confessor, family friend. Every day at the same time, seated in the same spot, surrounded by the same objects arranged in the same way – everything that can avert bad luck is worth trying! – Marie-Hélène went to work. She telephoned sometimes one, sometimes another, in the four corners of France. Sometimes the confession went on for hours. She listened, explained, passed judgement. It went on for months.

Finally to abbreviate a story that could make a novel, she manœuvred so well that she reconciled the adversaries, helped them to agree on the division of the estate, set a 'suitable' price for the house. One early morning in January, the formerly feuding relatives met in the office of the village *notaire*, who couldn't believe his eyes. The transaction concluded, Marie-Hélène revealed her identity, swept the entire family off to the local bistro and declared biblically, raising her glass: 'Now everyone embrace each other as I embrace you all.' And so it came to pass. The friend had his property, the family was reunited. Once again, Marie-Hélène had refused to despair, ever-faithful to her motto: 'It was impossible, but the idiot didn't know it and so he did it.'

As with her mother, this kind of impulsive boldness can lead to the most comical incidents – as Marcel Kébir would be the first to agree:

During a large dinner party at Ferrières at the beginning of our marriage, the conversation centred on World War II and the events of Mers-el-Kébir.* A girlfriend, whose only fault was always insisting on giving her opinion on every subject, categorically expressed her views. Irritated, Marie-Hélène interrupted the conversation and addressed her in an aggressive tone: 'You who think you're so smart, then tell us exactly who is this Marcel Kébir you seem to know so well!' A moment of dazed silence was followed by a burst of laughter. And since then, a postcard arrives from Oran from time to time, with the message: 'Love and kisses from Marcel'!

Indifference is another absentee from Marie-Hélène's gamut of emotions. She wants to know everything, not out of curiosity, but because of the genuine interest she takes in everybody and everything. So she asks questions, listens, consults, takes charge. She untangles intrigues, patches up lovers' quarrels, consoles the sorrowful and advises the sick; nothing motivates her more than lost causes.

These traits of character are minor ones, no more than small cards accompanying the 'ace of trumps' which Marie-Hélène was dealt at birth: a formidable love of life, the quality that so struck me from the start. A love of life as it happens to be, in its simplicity and reality – but just as much, of life in its extremes. Ordinary daily life, but also 'high life'. Refinement, parties, clothes, travel and decorating houses. Without false modesty, without self-consciousness and without vanity. But always with the sense of luck as well as with the spirit of childhood, that capacity for wonder that makes the unusual seem familiar and burdens light to bear.

This manner of being at ease within herself as well as in her role, of feeling as comfortable with her hair dishevelled as in an elegant evening gown, reminds me of the words of a Queen (English, of course) who, going to visit a slum area of London, said to her lady-in-waiting: 'Today give me my finest jewels. We are going to visit the poor and I cannot disappoint them.'

In daily life, Marie-Hélène adds to her profound qualities the spice of true originality and a sharp sense of the comical. She overflows with gaiety and mischief.

Such are the dominant elements of her personality, which compose a character apparently as solid as a rock. Such is, in fact, the image received by those who know her only slightly.

Paradoxically, while these brush-strokes are as accurate as I've been able to make them, nothing resembles her less than the portrait I've just

* The main French naval base in Algeria which was bombarded in 1940 by the British.

painted. The other side of the coin is missing, the fragile, inexpressed side, which alone can make the heart beat faster.

Seduction is born of mystery. And I've neglected – none the less important for being less evident – the weaknesses, the childlike vulnerability. For all of Marie-Hélène's passion, all of her boundless energy, have not made her an insensitive, self-confident, uncomplicated person. On the contrary, she is as vulnerable as she is violent.

Behind the poise there is timidity. Just like the vitality which seems to inhabit her, nothing within her can remain static. Praise is never far removed from insult, tears from laughter, anxiety from gaiety, and happiness from sorrow.

It may seem incredible that her exuberance is all too often shattered by pain. It must be difficult to imagine Marie-Hélène confined to a sickbed for weeks, perhaps for months on end. A fever of 106°, sometimes lasting all day long, in total darkness and despair . . . But at the first glimmer of hope, she grasps the chance and recovers her appetite for life. Since the slightest gesture is painful and getting dressed can be agony, she will prefer to slip a coat over her nightgown and go out in Paris to visit a friend, to see a film, an art exhibit, or simply the city lights . . . before returning to her bed, again in pain, exhausted, but having recovered an interest in life, determined to conquer. Without allowing herself to be handled, as her doctors know only too well, she intervenes, discusses their decisions, refuses a treatment if she sees no need for it, insists on knowing, understanding everything. They have ended up by calling her 'Professor de Rothschild'.

In her case, the famous saying: 'Life is solitude, hell is other people' should be reversed: for her, life is other people; it's solitude that's hell. This dependence on others is her Achilles' heel. The more she loves, the more she demands; but the more she has confidence, the more she risks a disappointment.

She is feminine also in her intuition, which defies all logic. When she was in her teens, she took the train to Tarrytown on the Hudson one day to return to Marymount School. She sat in the first empty seat, put her suitcase on the rack, opened her schoolbooks and became absorbed in her lessons. Her neighbour neither looked at her, spoke to her, nor touched her. However, suddenly activated by some strange unreasoning force, she rose and changed her seat for another a few rows away. The train stopped, new passengers came aboard. A few minutes later, a shot rang out. Marie-Hélène's neighbour of a few minutes earlier had just fired a gun and seriously wounded the woman now sitting next to him. He was insane. Interrogated by the police, Marie-Hélène was never able to explain the reason for her instinctive change of seat.

At about the same time, she once obstinately refused to board an aeroplane, for no rhyme nor reason, restrained by some vague premonition: the plane crashed in the Azores; Marcel Cerdan was among those who perished in the disaster.

Because she doesn't know the word 'reason', there's no point in trying to reason with her. With her, the heart governs and controls, commands and decides.

Perhaps because she is more often than others subject to illness, her primordial interest is in everything concerning medicine (she is a member of the Committee for Medical Research in France), and she enjoys nothing more than organizing a benefit for those who suffer. She has organized memorable events for the haemophiliacs, for instance, and for the Pasteur Institute, which were – even more important – resounding financial successes, at the personal cost to her of unremitting effort and attention, deciding and checking every detail herself. The way in which she always gives her utmost reminds me of the dictum we were taught as children: 'If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well.' Her perfectionism astonishes people, but above all it produces exceptional results in a world that has become increasingly careless. For example, in just one evening in aid of the restoration of Versailles, she succeeded in collecting more funds than had been raised during several years!

After medicine, her favourite hobbyhorse is art – and, if I may say so, 'she rides it well'. That is why the officials in charge of creating a Museum of the 19th Century in the Gare d'Orsay, the disused railway terminal on the Left Bank, insisted that she accept a membership on the Board of Directors.

Needless to add, with Marie-Hélène nothing is ever neutral, banal or mediocre – which does not exclude misunderstandings. People who know her only from magazines or gossip columns have a completely false impression of her. Because she is what she is and who she is, the press eternally describes her with that old cliché: 'The Queen of Paris'. It might cause smiles, if the public image were not in reality completely opposite to the private person. In this artificial sphere of society, her naturalness, her scorn for convention, her childlike enthusiasm, her enchantment with life, are rather disturbing – like a pebble tossed into a pond, which unsettles the complacent ducks.

It's true that she is talked about, her every deed and gesture is commented upon, she is a subject of discussion. She charms and she shocks.

She captivates and she offends. She is admired, criticized, envied, imitated. She enchants, she subjugates, she inspires jealousy.

One likes her or one dislikes her. In any case, she stirs, she disturbs, she upsets. One is for, one is against.

I am doubly lucky. I am for and I am against . . . but sometimes too, as Sacha Guitry said, 'close against . . . '

Twenty-five years ago, when I made my decision, I knew it all. The future with her seemed bathed in sunlight; not to dare seize its offer would be a refusal to live life fully, a refusal of life itself. Ardent, vulnerable, naïve and worldly at the same time, bursting with laughter or drowned in despair, she was like a child full of promise, touching, overflowing with affection, incomplete, who needed to be supported, strengthened, and who had everything to offer in return.

Our marriage, which was once described as 'the union of fire and water' has lasted for twenty-five years and is still going strong. But I must admit that this portrait I've just drawn of Marie-Hélène seems almost like the photographic negative of my own, with everything reversed. A follower of the quiet life, even a stay-at-home kind of existence, built around the office and the golf course, discipline and duty, I am regulated by the clock; she spends her time trying to catch up with time, engulfing me in delays, agitation, haste. I like a well-ordered life; I have to cope with perpetual improvisation. Nights for me are to sleep; for Marie-Hélène, life begins at sunset. And if she hasn't gone out, she stays up telephoning the four corners of the night. I am meticulous, almost obsessively so – a necktie out of place is a national crisis! Disorder is her natural realm.

It isn't always easy with this child who opens her wide green eyes on life as if for the first time, this Alice who refuses to live elsewhere than in Wonderland, to adapt to the requirements of daily life.

And sometimes I, so level-headed and placid, let myself be swept along and try to fit into her world, a world of tumult and storm, another planet, the van Zuylen universe. Then at times comes a storm of the most ridiculous, most stupid, most childlike insults . . .

After which we both land on our feet.

I've never forgotten that I was born with good fairies waving their wands over my cradle. I've tried to prove worthy of my good fortune and to do with my life what was required. I do not know if I've succeeded.

But I can only thank Heaven for having been able to seize this other chance: that meeting one day with the woman who was to make my existence even happier, and my life even richer, with the warmth of the heart.

As we all know, the life of a man and a woman is never simple. When the fire dies down, there is no longer the gleam of flames to illuminate – but the embers remain alive and provide even greater warmth.

More than a new path, I've felt the change in the weight of days and the

colours of time. There has been light and fireworks, magic and laughter, sun and stars.

Lightning and thunder too. Nothing is ever completely rosy. But for a quarter of a century I have forgotten, I've really forgotten, the colour of grey.

CHAPTER

16

Enchanted Memories

One year after Marie-Hélène and I were married, a son was born. We named him Edouard, after my father.

He was really my fourth child. With Alix, there was David; but I'd also brought up her daughter like a child of my own. With Marie-Hélène I now had Edouard; but her son, Philippe de Nicolay, soon afterwards unhappily lost his father, so of course I brought him up along with Edouard, who was only two years younger. There was never to my knowledge the slightest problem between them, nor was there with David, who was fifteen years older than Edouard. Lili, David, Philippe and Edouard were like brothers and sister, even though none of them had the same father and mother.

Philippe was adorable: with curly hair and dreamy blue eyes, he resembled a little blond angel; Edouard, a resourceful, inquisitive child, was a mischievous imp. Both of them were brought up, to use the sacrosanct expression, 'in the religion of their forefathers'. Philippe knew as well if not better than his brother the prayer of Chema – and in Hebrew, too! But perhaps Edouard could serve mass better than Philippe . . .

I've already said that Marie-Hélène changed my life. While nobody can really change somebody else, she undoubtedly enabled me to find what I'd been seeking without realizing it: a corner of my childhood.

I might easily have had the same reaction as my sisters: a rejection of luxury and fêtes . . . but Marie-Hélène led me along other paths, where in a strange way I began to return to the past. With resignation and indifference, I'd been drifting towards the shores of a dreary future. Now I was encouraged to assume the responsibility of maintaining an old tradition, a certain life-style. 'Neither quite the same, nor quite another . . .'

Marie-Hélène turned out to be more Rothschild than I was – which isn't so surprising after all, since she descends from James in the same degree as my son David and my nephew Eric. With her, there was no evading the continuation of our family traditions – with, perhaps, an added dash of

fantasy inherited from the van Zuylens.

But first, let's set the scene.

Since I'd given our Paris residence and the property at Reux to Alix and David, Marie-Hélène and I had to find somewhere to live. After spending a year or two in a hotel, then in a furnished apartment, we were offered a charming house on the rue de Courcelles which had belonged to Napoleon's niece, Princess Mathilde, a famous patroness of the arts during the Second Empire – a role in which I could easily imagine Marie-Hélène. I bought the 'rue de Courcelles'. And we lived there for seventeen years . . .

I gave up Reux regretfully. I adore Normandy, and the romantic charm of the estate was particularly appealing to me. Fortunately, there happened to be on the middle paddock of the Meautry stud, less than two miles from Deauville, a 15th-century manor-house which had belonged to one of the Dukes of Normandy. During my father's lifetime, it had been inhabited only occasionally, and then only by the veterinary surgeon when he came to treat the horses. Although run down, it was a veritable gem of the Renaissance – a two-faceted gem: one side old dovecotes, the other ancient stones. And in the main hall, a ceiling in which each beam ended in the sculpted, painted head of one of the Dukes of Normandy.

I decided to restore the manor and took charge of the structural repairs and landscaping, while Marie-Hélène attended to the interior decoration.

Today, some twenty years later, the month of August at Meautry is one of the gayest moments of the year. In the paddocks, young foals galloping at their mothers' side; with us in the manor, our guests; a few minutes away, the racecourse, the golf course, the sea; in the immediate neighbourhood, a number of relatives, friends . . . Everything I need to make me happy.

If Ferrières had never existed, I'd certainly have spent all of my weekends in Normandy and never dreamed of establishing a residence in the Île-de-France.

But Ferrières existed. Or rather, Ferrières *had* existed, because the château had been uninhabited for almost twenty years. After its requisition by the German Army and the looting of its art collections (only the Boucher tapestries hadn't taken the train to Germany; covered with neatly tacked-on jute-cloth, they'd escaped the notice of the Germans, who hadn't thought of looking underneath it) – after the war, in other words, the château remained unfurnished and unheated. It was only very partially opened when I'd come to shoot in the forest with a few friends, because we then stayed in the former 'pheasantry'.

A house that is abandoned for twenty years gradually deteriorates . . . and Ferrières had reached the stage of meriting the name given to it by a former employee of my parents who didn't seem to have appreciated the quiet charms of country life: 'the château of slow death'.

While Marie-Hélène and I were still a 'wandering' couple – we hadn't yet restored the manor at Meautry nor purchased the 'rue de Courcelles' – I had an idea: a corner of Ferrières as a weekend retreat.

Since the immensity of the château made a total restoration totally unrealistic, I envisaged limiting it to just one wing, the one overlooking the lake, with its three salons on the first floor and the bedrooms upstairs. But this was before Marie-Hélène stepped in. To the question in the Proust questionnaire: 'What is your idea of happiness?' she had replied: 'To live in a community of my choice' – in other words, in her eyes, a single wing of the château with only five or six guest rooms was little more than nothing at all, and we might as well forget it.

So I returned to my architect's plans. The enterprise, undoubtedly foolhardy, enthused me more and more. I took over a second wing. The refitting was becoming quite a vast project: piercing the thick walls in order to install central heating, reinforcing the foundations, stairways and terraces, re-landscaping the gardens, replanting the shrubbery . . .

Again, Marie-Hélène took charge of the interior decoration. Our division of responsibility was 'the right decision', as would become apparent later, there as elsewhere. Hers was a long, meticulous task: redecorating each salon, each apartment, inspired by Eugène Lami's original sketches; tracking down the original fabrics and having them woven again; collecting furniture of the period; finding artists capable of restoring the ceiling paintings, the mouldings . . .

In 1959, exactly a century after its inauguration by my great-grandfather, the château de Ferrières was reborn. We celebrated its resurrection with a ball. The theme was self-evident: the Castle of Sleeping Beauty.

After a long drive through the forest, the guests entered the grounds and suddenly came upon the château. Dimly lit, it seemed to emerge from the night, ghostly and mysterious. Immense cobwebs, like silvery threads, hung from the roofs. A faintly-lit phantom vessel glided silently on the lake, as if it had been drifting, unmanned, since the beginning of time. And then, as if with the wave of a fairy wand, the château magically came to life: candelabra shone in every window, music welled forth, dancers appeared . . . At dawn, nobody could bear to leave so soon! We had to serve an improvised breakfast . . .

With the scenery now in position or replaced, a new play was to be acted.

While I'd always tried to be worthy of the heritage I've received and to continue the tradition of initiative and adaptability that had been responsible for the success of my ancestors, I may have forgotten one thing: the Rothschilds didn't owe their reputation to business achievement alone, but also to a certain style, a certain attitude towards life. With Marie-Hélène, I found myself caught up from one day to the next in a whirlwind that was also an echo of the past. With her characteristic exuberance, she too conceives of life as a fête – but she believes that a real fête has to be shared, that real pleasure is first of all the pleasure of those you love.

Like the younger generation which prefers to live in groups, among comrades, our life expanded to accommodate our friendships. Our 'family' now included everyone who was close to our hearts. An American journalist wittily remarked: 'Since Marie-Hélène has twelve best friends, the Baron Guy restored twelve guest apartments at Ferrières.' The truth is that there were fifteen of them; but even if I'd agreed to restore twenty-four, all of them would have been permanently occupied.

The manor at Meautry is sufficient proof of it. There weren't enough bedrooms for Marie-Hélène's liking, so the horse boxes in the nearby stables were transformed into guest rooms. Then it was the turn of the hay barn. After which a small farm on the estate was restored – but then the dining room was too small for so many guests. Like the gourmet who takes another serving of cheese to finish his wine, then some more wine to finish the cheese, this sort of thing can become a vicious circle!

Ferrières gradually recovered the radiance I'd remembered from my childhood. I organized shooting parties again, almost every Sunday in the autumn. But with or without a shoot, the château was filled with guests all year round. There were our intimate friends, an extension of 'the family', whose rooms were permanently reserved for them; and there were the friends of our friends. Then there were the new acquaintances whom Marie-Hélène attracted. I began to meet all sorts of people I'd never dreamed of getting to know before, believing we had nothing in common.

Marie-Hélène has a gift for making friends with all kinds of artists. It surprised me to discover that in artistic fields – and, more generally, in the realm of great talent – outstanding success seems to be based on something these exceptional individuals possess in common, often in secret. For example, the great virtuosi: my music-loving mother, Grisha's Piatigorsky's marriage to my sister, my stay in America, provided me with many opportunities to come in contact with a number of 'musical interpreters' as they like to describe themselves. To name only two of them – Isaac Stern and Rostropovitch – I find in them the same ardour, the same open-heartedness, the same enthusiasm – in short, the same passion for life –

that was so evident in Grisha and in Arthur Rubinstein. This common trait cannot be explained by music alone: if it may 'soothe a savage breast', it can dissolve differences of character. Among Nureyev, Maria Callas and Cordobès, there's a family resemblance; Elizabeth Taylor, Karajan and Borg have something in common too. While their talents are diverse, they share the same passion for life. It's understandable that Marie-Hélène should be drawn to them; it's understandable that they should feel a kinship with her.

Some people imagine the Rothschilds going from fête to fête, from racecourses to cocktail parties, from dinners to balls. If this were true, they'd hardly have time to change their clothes and drop in at the office – not so disagreeable a detour when the office is a bank and when it belongs to you!

They forget that James, a hard worker before the Eternal* (he knew everything, supervised everything), bequeathed to his descendants, among other riches, the precept of the labourer who taught his children:

> . . . before his death,
> that work is a treasure.

But this didn't prevent him from entertaining four times a week in his house on the rue Laffitte – and with what lavishness! His dinners often included over sixty guests; alongside the most illustrious names of the aristocracy, one would find 'famillionairely' on his arm (the word is Heinrich Heine's) most of the celebrities of the day: scholars, writers, musicians, painters, poets – Claude Bernard and Arago, Balzac and Georges Sand, Rossini and Chopin, Ingres and Delacroix . . .

James not only enjoyed entertaining with extravagance, he also knew how to do it with style and panache. Of course, his chef was none other than Carême, who had worked for Talleyrand; and the organizer of his fêtes was Berthault, the architect who had advised the Count d'Artois, a party specialist if there ever was one, at the time of his famous fêtes at Bagatelle.

Marie-Hélène loves celebrations. From birthdays (her first birthday present is a family party) to Christmas (her favourite holiday). For twenty years, Ferrières was the setting for Christmas festivities that recalled the happiest hours of my childhood. The tree was even bigger; the Christmas Eve 'Reveillon' meal was served in the dining room, decorated according to a different romantic theme each year; mountains of gifts filled the salon

* 'The Baron de Rothschild was not one of those to take it easy', wrote the *Figaro* on 2 November 1868, with a fine sense of understatement.

to the ceiling and nearly burst its four walls; and the long night was filled with enchantment as everyone gave presents to everyone else.

But Marie-Hélène also loves a fête for its own sake, as a parenthesis in time, as the breath, the smile of life. An imaginative décor in which gaiety, wonderment and dreams all dance together. The most minute detail then becomes vitally important; a single false note can break the magic melody.

Giving a ball is not necessarily the same as having a ball. A brilliant night is preceded by many sleepless ones. A veritable Penelope, aided by a few exhausted friends, she arranges and rearranges the seating plan until each guest ends up with the neighbour close to his heart. Each separate element must be thought of, planned; a flower, a light, a decoration, moved a hundred times; until the very last minute . . .

Isn't it part of our role in life, each according to his own style and taste, to brighten it with the superfluous, to have the courage to enrich it with a few flashes of ephemeral beauty? 'The superfluous is so necessary', once wrote a previous tenant of the Hôtel Lambert: Voltaire.

So I'll talk about Marie-Hélène's fêtes because they've been so talked about. They have been praised, they have been criticized. But they haven't been forgotten.

Marie-Hélène can always find a pretext for a party . . . while I try to exert a restraining influence on her penchant for three-ring circuses, I know full well that certain foolish expenses are no sign of folly. However, the financiers must not forget to be cobblers; and they must remember to sing the morning after in order to take their minds off the accounts.

I won't recite the entire anthology of fêtes given or organized by Marie-Hélène. Just two gala evenings at Ferrières: one 'In Remembrance of Things Past', and another whose theme was 'Imagined Time'. The Proust Ball and the Surrealist Ball.

In the winter of 1972, an invitation cut out of a sky painting by Magritte with strange hieroglyphics floating among the clouds must have at first mystified the people who received them. But when it occurred to them to read the text in a mirror, they learned that they were invited to a surrealistic dinner party at Ferrières on 12 December.

That night, due to ingenious lighting effects, the château at the end of the dark drive seemed to be in flames.

As the guests went up the main staircase, everything appeared calm, harmonious, grandiose, as usual . . . except that an army of lackeys, lackeys with cats' heads, seemed to have fallen asleep on the steps, the banisters, the landings, in the most grotesque positions.

Then began an interminable voyage through a dim labyrinth, a forest of black ribbons that had to be separated like dense branches, groping in the dark. Now and then some of the liveried cats would suddenly appear, bearing torches: weird phantom animals amid the giant cobwebs. Long-forgotten texts of Carco or Max Jacob came to mind. The way was so long that finally, shivering with delightful horror, the guests passed through the last portals of this surrealistic hell with a sigh of relief. They entered the tapestry salon, impassive as ever in its gold, reds and pinks – where Marie-Hélène (with the head of a hind weeping diamond tears) and myself (wearing a head-dress representing a still-life arrangement on a huge platter) tried to suppress our cries of admiration, and appear to recognize the raving mad (disguised) arrivals. All the while, a concealed pianist was playing music by Satie.

In the salons, a fantastic assortment of masks inspired by Magritte, Max Ernst, Chirico, Picabia, Delvaux, Tanguy and, needless to say, Dali, congratulated each other on their ingenious ideas. And suddenly there appeared the divine Dali himself, who'd only needed to wax his moustache without having to change his head; he was sedately seated in a wheelchair pushed by two nurses, under an umbrella of dazzling flashbulbs; in his hand of genius, a laser beam! His wife Gala wore her most gala evening dress. Leonor Fini was a nightingale. The painter Stanislao Lepri had buried a host of little celluloid children in his long false pepper-and-salt beard. One stumbled over all kinds of fallen fruit: apple-headed figures stretched their necks to vie with pear-headed ones; architectural monuments envied clockworks, original animals competed with imaginary creatures, beasts of Hell pursued fugitives from Paradise on Earth. Then there was the unexpected.

Audrey Hepburn wore a cage over her head; she had to open a little door in order to eat! Alexis de Redé's mask was composed of drawers filled with portraits of Marie-Hélène in the guise of a smiling Mona Lisa – but with four separate profiles, each one wearing a different smile! (This mask is now in the Barcelona Museum, where one can buy a postcard of it with the caption: 'The last Rothschild ball' – like the last of the Mohicans . . .)

Michel Guy, the Minister of Culture, had stabbed his bald pate with a dagger, dripping rubies. Denise Thyssen was the woman with two faces: above her own, she wore a head-dress that was an exact replica of it, the blond hair of both inextricably intermingled; and one didn't know which one to talk to; it was disconcerting to hear the reply come out of the wrong mouth!

The guests were given cards to indicate their tables: the table of the Sleeping Cat; the table of the Dethroned Queens; the table of the Shoes Fit to be Tied . . . but this gave them no indication of where to go. So the

guests wandered about in complete disorder, mischievously guided by butlers wearing top hats, carnations in their button-holes, whose mission was to solve these puzzles and finally lead them to their places.

On each table, covered by a tablecloth representing the sky, there was a centre-piece inspired by some surrealist painter or poet, designed to be at the same time crazy, incongruous and poetic. For example on the table entitled 'Eggs à la Florentine', it was a mound of cooked spinach, transpierced by the carcass of a giant bird, garnished with women's breasts. At each place setting there was a fur-covered plate and a placecard: a square of sky held between the ruby-red lips of Mae West; a pale blue dinner roll – the famous *pain peint* (the two words are pronounced the same in French, their literal translation being 'painted bread'); a wine glass with the label *vin vain* (another play on words, since these two are also pronounced alike, and the meaning – or rather, lack of meaning – is 'vain wine'); there was also a bubble-blower and a menu.

The menu, inscribed on a background of sky and clouds, was all the more hallucinating because none of the sixty guests read the same words. And such delirious words! Double meanings, outrageous puns. Marie-Hélène and her friends must have had a lot of fun finding these ideas, or rather, trying to confuse the ideas! French-speaking readers may appreciate the cheese course: 'les choses dégoulinantes' for some, were 'beaucoup de Brie pour rien' for others. Finally came the 'Dessert des Tartares' – or, as on another menu, 'At last!' Since the dishes were described so wildly, nobody had the slightest idea of what was going to be served next.

The warmly applauded climax was a huge platter carried by eight men, with a nude woman reclining on a bed of roses, all made of edible spun sugar, to be hacked to pieces. 'Dessert of the Barbarians?'

After dinner, the festivities moved to the salons, to dancing in a Turkish night-club, to another salon where a photographer took pictures of the guests seated on a Dali sofa in the form of a pair of lips, underneath a picture of Mae West. The whirl went on till dawn. Everyone was enchanted with himself, everyone was enchanted to be there . . . in short, everyone was enchanted.

The next morning, our everyday heads seemed very strange indeed!

But it was Marie-Hélène's Proust Ball, in celebration of the great writer's 100th birthday, that left me the most beautiful memories.

I can do no better than to quote, with apologies, from a description of the great fêtes of Paris, because this account recaptures the atmosphere exactly as I remember it:

In December 1971, Marie-Hélène de Rothschild received the following letter

from one of her friends:

'It was high time.

The Proust Centennial was about to end in dreariness, with lectures, exhibits, speeches, symposiums, boredom and stiffness: everything he despised.

And you had the simply brilliant idea of giving a ball in his honour, in honour of Marcel Proust who, during his lifetime in the world of society which he immortalized, had occupied only a modest place at the foot of the table.

And such a ball!

From the four corners of the earth, beauty, aristocracy, power, talent, fortune, came to an extravagant festivity such as one thought he'd been the last to witness . . .

You have added a lovely chapter to his work by letting us enjoy for an evening things that one believed forever past. Bravo. Je t'embrasse.

Pierre'*

So there was a ball at Ferrières . . . At Ferrières, whose walls have seen parade before them since the turn of the century, during shooting parties, brilliant receptions and intimate gatherings, all the personages who inspired *In Remembrance of Things Past*. No setting could resemble more closely the great writer's descriptions: in the heart of the Brie region, where Proust found most of the names for the characters in his novels; at this misty, nostalgic time of year when even the most dazzling fêtes are tinged with melancholy.

An old-fashioned engraved card invited to dinner that evening the descendants of Proustian heroes: aristocrats and diplomats, bankers and royalty, members of the Academy and Ministers of the Republic, artists and society, from Paris and elsewhere. The gentlemen were requested to wear white tie and tails, the women to adorn their hair with feathers, jewels or flowers.

The guests responded with enthusiasm. Not for ages had one witnessed the spectacle of 800 guests attired with such elegance and such a luxury of refined and subtle details: one had to go 'by way of Guermantes' – or rather, next door, to Ferrières.

The château is situated at the end of a long drive bordered by huge, leafless trees. At every window of the misty façade, a crystal candelabra. Eight enormous torches light the monumental entrance, where luxurious limousines discharge their passengers, personages resuscitated from the past, still muffled in furs.

They climb the double winding main staircase, decorated with palm trees and greenery. Twenty gypsy musicians in red uniforms serenade the beautiful women who remove their cloaks, revealing the full splendour of their evening gowns.

At the entrance, everyone is given a card on which is written in violet ink a Proustian name (Swann, Odette, Gilberte – Verdurin, Charlus, Saint-Loup . . .) that indicates one's dinner table. After passing through a long,

* Pierre de Ségur, descendant of the famous writer the Countess de Ségur and of the Marquis de Sade, was obviously destined to be an expert in fêtes as well as in literature!

mysterious corridor, lit only by the candelabra held by valets in red livery and powdered wigs, and having whispered in the ear of the barker a 'remembered' name (Duke or Duchess of Guermantes, Marquis and Marquise de Villeparisis, Prince des Laumes . . .) one finally enters the tapestry room with its red and pink atmosphere, to be greeted by the host and hostess: he in tail coat and grey moustache, she in a long pale satin gown by Saint-Laurent. One proceeds through the blue salon, then the large music room. Everything is intact: furniture, tapestries, bibelots, mirrors; only the spectacular arrangements of pale and white flowers, bursts of palm fronds and greenery, remind one that this is a special occasion.

The atmosphere becomes warmer, the crowd more dense; one can hardly hear the pianist playing compositions by Reynaldo Hahn and Satie in the background. One finally manages to approach the mauve and green dinner-table plans to find one's place. One tries to remember to avoid stepping on the ladies' trains. One exclaims in admiration over the costumes invented by one's friends. How lovely! How brilliant! Dinner is served.

One proceeds into the most splendid hothouse, the most gigantic winter garden, ever seen. The Baroness Guy, and the artists Jean-François Daigre and Valerian Rybar, have had the colossal main hall of the château surrounded by an extraordinary forest consisting of thousands of plants and exotic flowers visible through immense glass trellises. To bring more intimacy to this room of cathedral dimensions, they have draped the ceiling with green silk, gathered in the centre by an enormous crystal chandelier.

Orchids, vines and greenery adorn the gold, the columns, the statues and busts. Three hundred and fifty guests have found their tables, where they gradually discover a mass of refined details: the Proustian names written on mauve fans tied with violet ribbons; the table-cloths of mauve pleated chiffon; the napkins of mauve linen bordered with blond lace; the beautiful centre-pieces of mauve and violet cattleyas, Odette's favourite flower; the menus written in old-fashioned script announcing mysterious dishes and prestigious wines: consommé Aurélie, mousseline de sole Mahenu, duck à la Madrilène, salade Clarinda, soufflé glacé Agénor; Château-Lafite-Rothschild, Moêt et Chandon, Château-d'Yquem . . .

Dinner is served by an army of butlers in scarlet Louis XV costumes. It is perfect: hot, delicious, rapid. In the background, gypsy music turns heads and hearts.

Towards midnight, a second wave of guests arrives: the young friends of our host's son, superb young people, arrogant and slightly stiff in their formal period evening dress; dazzling young girls and women, bristling with frills, feathers and jewels.

There's dancing in the most amazing night-club imaginable: the shadowy dining room of the château, lit only by the gleam of its extraordinary series of Cordoba leather panels with their gold background, painted after cartoons by Rembrandt; a modern orchestra, small tables draped in gold and green, the twinkle of candlelight.

The rumour circulates that a surprise awaits the guests in a small salon as yet unexplored. There, in front of an immense 19th-century painting of the

château, are arranged a Napoleon III chair, a small round table, and a potted palm; one can pose in front of a magnificent old-fashioned camera, circa 1900. The photographer is none other than Cecil Beaton! Attired in period costume and concealed beneath his black camera cloth, he 'draws the portrait' that will be sent later, as a souvenir, to the privileged guests of this magical night.

One returns to the vast winter garden, which has been miraculously transformed into a ballroom: immense mauve buffets decorated with orchids and, in the centre, gigantic *pièces montées* – edible constructions of those little Madeleine cakes immortalized by Proust, and candied violets. Forgotten waltzes, polkas, mazurkas. Then to the other salon for a few modern dances. Back through the salons to waltz again . . . and again . . . One can see from the ladies' smiles that each of them, this evening, feels like Proust's Duchess of Guermantes.

Day breaks. The great lake emerges from the fog. The gypsies prepare to leave. The dream is coming to an end . . .

Such lovely 'things past'!

As I was leaving the fête in the early hours of the morning, I was filled with a profound nostalgia. I wish I'd been able to say, like Philippe Baer: 'All these plumes, this foliage, this profusion of orchids, have intoxicated me as much as the pursuit of shadows – pleasingly plump – of the beauteous young girls and women. What an admirable fête! I'd have needed a thousand monocles to see it all, a thousand and one nights to exhaust my pleasure!'

In concluding his chapter, the same author wrote:

> In those days, balls were the supreme example of the art of living. For me, they were like voyages to fairyland, to dreamland, leaving behind enchanted memories. Life stops for a moment, moves back in time, and we are struck with wonder!
>
> Submerged worlds emerge again. One can judge, criticize, even loathe, when one doesn't know that the ephemeral can defy eternity, and that nothing can nor should be more beautiful than the ephemeral.*

In describing these balls, I've felt almost like an historian reviving a vanished world. With perhaps even greater nostalgia, since it concerns not only myself. An entire era fades away as new ones appear, and a certain art of living disappears at the same time. A feeling of inevitability . . . man is capable of marvellous inventions, but he sometimes forgets to breathe life into them.

Experiments have shown that people can lose their sanity if they are prevented from dreaming; prolonging the experiment can even lead to death. Societies also die, as we know. Could it be because their dreams have been taken from them?

Never has there been so much talk of fêtes as since there are no more of

* *Sous le Casque d'Alexandre*, Presses de la Cité, 1972.

them. The obligatory fêtes we are encouraged to support are not at all the same. As if everyone could feel like dancing and singing in the streets at an appointed hour . . .

One autumn afternoon in 1975, Marie-Hélène telephoned me at the bank.

'Do you still feel young?' she asked.

I couldn't imagine what was coming next. The question obviously preceded some upheaval! I replied in a calm voice that I still felt in pretty good shape . . . and waited for her to continue.

'Young enough to change the course of your life in the space of two hours?'

'Why not?'

My voice had become less confident. Damn it! I'd forgotten to be wary . . .

And so I learned that the Hôtel Lambert was for sale, and that Marie-Hélène, after carefully studying the project, thought we should embark on the adventure of buying it.

Whether I felt young or not was beside the point: the enterprise seemed sheer folly to me. After years of effort, I'd only just convinced Marie-Hélène of the necessity of closing the château de Ferrières, and now she was already asking me to buy a château in Paris!

I was perfectly familiar with the Hôtel Lambert because Alexis de Redé, one of our closest friends, was its principal tenant. He occupied one floor, the one containing the most handsome salons and the famous Gallery of Hercules. During almost thirty years of residence, he had resuscitated the 18th-century 'palace', restoring the building itself, the paintings, tracking down the original decorative elements whenever possible (some panels were now in the Louvre, including those of the *cabinet d'amour*), or unearthing period panelling and paintings that could replace them.

In the words of Voltaire, who once had lived there: 'It is a palace for a king who is also a philosopher.' But I was neither a king nor a philosopher!

I knew that Chopin had often played the piano there – perhaps a certain Ballade or Waltz dedicated to my great-grandfather or to his daughter Charlotte, James's only daughter, who had been one of Chopin's best pupils. I knew, of course, that Chopin had been a protégé of my ancestors; they had received him, helped him to become famous . . . But all of that did not constitute a sound argument!

Actually, Marie-Hélène had analysed the enterprise from every point of view. She realized that the various independent apartments would permit us to gather together the different generations of the family under the same roof. David had recently married; Edouard and Philippe were now grown-

up. Moreover, my mother had died a few months earlier, and I had to find a worthy setting and sufficient space for most of my grandfather Alphonse's art collections. Since I was in the process of closing Ferrières, it was perhaps not so unreasonable after all to exchange, as they say in a game of Monopoly, the 'rue de Courcelles' and the 'Avenue Foch' for the 'rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Île'.

The negotiations promised to be long and difficult; the Polish family that had owned it for over a century was very demanding; some foreigners were bidding for it too. Marie-Hélène took charge of the operations and, with a judicious dosage of audacity and reticence, she succeeded: the sales agreement was signed, the Hôtel Lambert returned to French ownership.

The palace is one of the finest examples of classical architecture, created by the combined talents of the builders of Versailles: Le Vau, Lebrun, Le Sueur. Constructed in the form of a square around a central courtyard, it is prolonged on the north-east by a wing advancing into the tip of the Île Saint-Louis like the prow of a ship, with the Seine on one side, a formal French garden on the other. The reception rooms are in the two wings of the building bordering the garden, and occupy two floors. The Gallery of Hercules (so-called because of its painted ceilings on which Lebrun depicted the hero's labours) and the adjoining salons had already been restored; the ground floor remained to be done. Marie-Hélène set about the task, with the aid of the Italian decorator Renzo Mongiardino.

Within a year they produced a veritable resurrection of the 17th century. Thanks to unimaginable efforts (when Marie-Hélène was ill, she'd sometimes come by ambulance to supervise the work), they succeeded in creating, as James had done with Queen Hortense's house, 'a poetic residence that had more the air of the palace of an artist than the hôtel of a millionaire'. The decoration of each room was planned in view of the works of art each one would contain, so that every item of the collection would seem to have remained in its original setting.

While the work was going on, Marie-Hélène asked me to stay away from the rue Saint-Louis-en-l'Île. The surprise would be worth waiting for.

At last the day arrived when I received an 'official invitation'. I was admitted to the sanctuary. Everything had been prepared to enchant and astonish me, even to the lighted candles in all the candelabra.

What a dazzling sight! What delight to find these paintings, these objects I'd always known, in this unique setting, new to me, but already familiar! And how moving to find the paintings of my childhood at Ferrières come to life again, the Bernard Palissy collection, the Majolicas and enamels my mother had assembled (now arranged on wooden panels reproducing the parquets of Versailles), and my old friends revived within their frames. The figures in the Cordoba leathers accompanying David in

his triumph had emerged from their panels at Ferrières and now resumed their original places in the procession: reunited, they formed a frieze going all the way around one of the salons. Betty and *The Astrologer* (who is often referred to in Vermeer catalogues as *The Astronomer*, but whom we always called *The Astrologer*, for some unknown reason) faced each other on opposite walls of the *cabinet d'amour*, prepared for conversation. In my bedroom, the wholesome smile of the *Woman with the Rose* was beaming. All of these objects, these persons, really seemed to start a new life. My great-grandmother Betty, the niece and then the wife of James, mother of Alphonse . . . how many different lives had she lived, in how many different rooms, how many different family homes, to how many of my ancestors had she addressed her wistful smile? What ties bound me to her? What new ties would we form?

'The strange life of objects . . . ' It's quite true that the Betty of Ferrières did not exactly resemble the one on the rue de Courcelles, who was not precisely the same Betty as in the *cabinet d'amour* . . . 'nor quite the same, nor quite another . . . ' another pose, another look, another wistful smile . . .

In the meantime, Ferrières closed its gates.

Since 1970, it became increasingly clear to me that an estate of that importance entailed responsibilities which would one day be impossible to shoulder. Relinquishing a home to which so many memories attach one is a painful decision, difficult to make. And I was alone. Marie-Hélène, our family, our friends, everyone who had participated in or followed the restoration of the château, couldn't bring themselves to approve of my decision: so much effort for only fifteen years of enjoyment! But the future was to prove me right.

In order to conserve at least the precious advantage of owning a residence in the middle of a forest, far from any suburban zone and yet only half an hour from Paris, I had a chalet built on another part of the grounds. After endless discussions with friends, countless decisions endlessly revised, we finally agreed on the site. It was a low building with a shingled roof and walls, level with the land, equipped with every modern convenience for service and maintenance. 'The chalet' blended into the surrounding nature as much as the château dominated, and was therefore remote from it.

Hoping to steal a march on the evolution of history, I'd planned to exchange a country château and a private house in Paris for a small chalet and a city apartment. And now I found myself with a palace on an island and a chalet in the forest! As usual with Marie-Hélène, 'it's always the unexpected that happens' . . .

The forest of my childhood, the chalet for a new life. But the château was still there, only a few hundred yards away. Out of sight, but so close to my heart.

I received some fabulous offers for it. But I always refused to sell it to a foreigner. My first intention was to give it to the French government. Marie-Hélène feared that a donation to such an anonymous entity could only lead to gradual degradation; she advised me to let some charity benefit from it, or – even better – an organization concerned with medicine. But the French Medical Research Institute could see no use for it. The Rector of the University of Paris (Mallet, at the time) believed that Ferrières could play a role in the cultural life of the nation: one part of the château would become a Napoleon III museum, and another would be used for university seminars. I stipulated that the 340 acres of grounds I was donating along with the château should obligatorily be open to the public. It seemed a simple, wonderful solution, and gave us the impression of making a truly 'useful gift'.

In practice, however, problems and expenses arose (so I'm told) far greater than foreseen. Be that as it may, I can't help feeling that the gradual abandonment of the château is a fate worse than death. I can't help deploring the government's refusal to release from the vast reserves of the national museums, a few pieces of Napoleon III furniture for the salons. And I deplore the fact that all of the available apartments still await their seminar students, that the grounds have become overgrown with weeds. Sadder still, perhaps, is the thought of those unhappy tourists who come to visit Ferrières, only to wander through empty rooms.

For a price, the château can now be hired for a wedding or a film location. A few scenes from *Guignolo* were shot there, as was the television production of *Bel Ami*, starring Marisa Berenson – who shared with us some of the 'very rich hours' of the château . . .

We'd dreamed of another life for Ferrières. And I am scandalized by the fact that at present nobody seems willing to assume the responsibility for stirring up this lethargy, reversing the trend. Administrative red tape, inter-ministerial rivalries, jealousies, government irresponsibility . . . I won't be taken in again!

I've talked a lot about things that might be called (in the style of Colette) 'lightheartedly, light'. Undoubtedly because, at a time when the Rothschilds find themselves obliged to change their lives, I've acquired a better understanding of what constitutes their prestige and their myth.

It isn't merely the fact that they knew how to create and conserve a fortune. It's having dared to undertake the most difficult enterprises,

remaining true to themselves through changing times and fashions. They have never dreamed of feeling ashamed of their wealth nor of disguising their life-style, no more than they have ever failed to assume their roles and responsibilities as Jews.

According to an old French motto: '*Noblesse oblige*' – one must live up to one's name. The Rothschilds' condition of life has imposed on them a second motto: '*Richesse oblige*' – one must live up to one's fortune. And they may have succeeded in living up to both of them.

To the current political pundits who try to promote a hatred of money as a prelude to promises of a rosy future, let me quote this phrase: 'A love of life and a love of fêtes are attributes of a happy people.'

CHAPTER

17

Stick 'em Up!

'Papa, don't ask questions. Bring me 200 million francs* right away. Double quick!'

I'd been awakened by the telephone. I glanced at my watch: 7.30 a.m. David's voice sounded choked, more from urgency than anguish. The early hour, the incomprehensible words, the commanding tone, so unlike him – it didn't make sense. I shook myself. It must be some kind of a joke. But what?

I immediately thought of kidnapping. But a gangster doesn't let his victim telephone this way, enabling the entire police force to be alerted at once.

Gambling debts? Impossible. My son didn't gamble, and in any case, such a sum was beyond the bounds of reason. Blackmail? Woman trouble? I racked my brain for an explanation, however absurd. I tried to imagine a scenario. Nothing fitted.

I was sure of only one thing: David was being threatened. But what sort of a threat? Was he being menaced by one man, several men, an organized gang? How could I know?

No theory satisfied me. I was seized with anxiety . . .

I dialled the number of the Avenue Raphaël where my son lived with his mother, Alix. The butler replied with his usual dignity:

'Just one moment, Monsieur le Baron, I'll get Monsieur David.'

There was something crazy, surrealistic in this adventure. Who ever heard of the butler being permitted to answer the telephone during a hold-up? I told David that the bank didn't open until nine o'clock and that there was no way for me to procure such a sum before then. His only reply:

'Step on it, Papa!'

I had the feeling that the slightest questioning on my part could provoke a drama. David, obviously tense, seemed to wish to hang up as quickly as possible. I mustn't upset the apple cart; I mustn't give the impression of

* In old francs: about half a million dollars.

possibly being in league with the police. I had to act, but in the dark.

In order to recover my composure before going into action, I performed my twenty minutes of daily exercises, a ritual I've never failed to observe, not even under the bombs at Dunkirk. A discipline that leaves room for exceptions is no longer a discipline.

I decided against waking up Marie-Hélène, so as not to upset her.

I phoned David several times to explain my delay, and above all to show him I was behind him, that I was thinking of nothing else. When the bank opened at nine o'clock, I was told there wasn't enough cash on hand to provide the sum I needed; it would have to be collected from the Bank of France, which didn't open until 9.30.

Another phone call, another reply, with still the same tone of urgency: 'Hurry up . . . quick! . . . '

In the meantime, one of my associates had telephoned the police and the head of the municipal police was on the line. As I was explaining the situation to him, he interrupted:

'Just the man you need happens to be walking into my office at this very moment. I'll put him on . . . '

It was Commissioner Le Mouel, head of the Anti-terrorist Squad. He asked me to see him for five minutes before I joined my son.

'OK, rue d'Andigné, in front of number 2, in fifteen minutes.'

On this street, which is separated from the Avenue Raphaël by a public garden, we could meet without being spotted.

My chauffeur drove me to the appointed place. A short grey-haired man approached me, calm and kindly looking.

'Monsieur de Rothschild?'

'Yes . . . '

'Do you have the money?'

'Yes, I'm going now.'

'Don't worry. They are certainly gangsters. As soon as they've got the money, their one idea will be to make a quick getaway.'

'I hope so. Anyway, I don't want a kidnapping.'

'Is there a rear entrance to the building?'

'I've no idea, I don't live there.'

The Commissioner requested a delay of a quarter of an hour in order to get his men in position, but I was too nervous: 'Impossible. I'll give you five minutes.'

During this interval, I forced myself to walk calmly back to my car, got in, and asked the chauffeur to drive me to the entrance of my son's building. There I found the cook and Vava, the elderly nanny, on the pavement, both of them visibly frantic.

'Oh, Monsieur Guy, it's terrible! Poor David is upstairs with a man

holding a gun on his chest!'

And thus I learned that there was only one man, not that this was particularly reassuring. On the contrary, from the police point of view, it only served to confirm the irrational aspect of the affair. And for the first time, I thought of a lunatic.

I rushed into the lift, my heart pounding fast, my mind perfectly lucid. I rang the apartment doorbell and shouted in a loud voice: 'It's me, Papa. I've got the money. I'm alone.'

I was still haunted by the possibility that a gesture of panic might lead to the irreparable.

The butler opened the door with the usual ceremony, as for a dinner party! It seemed more and more absurd.

Standing in the centre of the living room was a shortish young man, twenty or twenty-five years old, wearing an ugly khaki-coloured raincoat, as unengaging as could be, white-faced, wide-eyed, stubborn-looking; he was holding a .22 long rifle pointed towards the floor.

I entered, trying to appear relaxed. I'd taken in the scene at a glance: David, in a crushed strawberry-coloured dressing-gown, stood facing the stranger. At his side, the masseur, a sturdy fellow, still in street clothes. I tried to avoid looking at either of them and approached the bandit. When I was a few steps away, I opened the case containing the bundles of 500 franc notes, wrapped in cardboard, according to banking tradition.

'Here's the money. Do you want me to hand it over to you, or would you like me to open the packages and show you the money?'

'Yes,' replied the man simply, visibly confused.

'*Maître d'hôtel*,' I then said, 'will you bring me a pair of scissors?' And I undid the package, revealing the stacks of new banknotes.

I began to regain some confidence. 'Would you like me to toss them over to you?'

He obviously didn't know what to do. Finally he decided: 'Put them in my suitcase!'

His bag was on the floor in front of me. At this point, he moved towards the living room window that overlooked the street. If I'd been armed, I could easily have subdued him. However, even if the police had offered me a gun, I'd certainly have refused it. I thought there might be several gangsters, and I'd have been afraid that one of them might search me, and all would have been lost. One thing is sure: I felt like a real wild beast. Once I've been attacked, I'm ready for anything, even to shoot and kill . . .

But my outer calm concealed my inner anguish. If one's heartbeat quickens in the face of danger, one does not become any the less fatalistic. One accepts what's coming, along with the risks involved. In such a state

of hypertension, a sort of exaltation takes over the control of one's nervous system in some strange way, and makes one choose the right reflex. One is afraid, one's mouth is dry, but the adrenalin flows abundantly and multiplies one's capabilities.

The man at the window seemed to have lost his last drop of *sang-froid*:

'Who are those men down there?'

'How should I know? You know very well that I don't live here. You've been here longer than I have. You should know better than me.'

Already, I couldn't resist making a sarcastic remark. It was perhaps a way of getting the upper hand, but above all of reassuring myself.

I hadn't yet been able to size up my enemy; however, while my eyes saw only a dangerous, cool, rational man, I could sense his inner panic. He suddenly left the window and came towards us:

'You're going to drink this . . . and then you'll fall asleep . . . '

This really foxed me; I was dumbfounded. What was this, some magic potion? Fortunately, David spoke up:

'But you've already been told that it won't have the slightest effect. So why bother?'

The man hesitated. Then he suddenly made up his mind.

'All right. Well, you're going to come with me. We'll go downstairs together.'

David turned towards me, saying: 'I'm coming with you.'

Very calmly – at least apparently so – I addressed the man with the gun:

'Do you realize what you're planning to do? At eleven o'clock in the morning, a boy in a pink dressing-gown, in the middle of the crowd, and you expect to pass unnoticed?'

'You're right,' he replied, almost with a note of apology in his voice.

I breathed again. David was saved!

The masseur was next to volunteer. And the three of us left the apartment together.

It was then that I scored my first decisive advantage. I looked my man up and down, with an ironic eye:

'Do you really intend to go out with those gloves on in the street?'

He was, in fact, wearing a pair of bright pink rubber gloves, the kind used for dishwashing. I do believe he blushed in confusion, like a child caught red-handed. I felt no great satisfaction in observing his embarrassment, but I was now sure that the situation was getting beyond his control. Without dropping his gun, he started to remove the gloves with his teeth, a complicated and ridiculous procedure which took at least five minutes.

'We'll take the lift,' I said.

'Oh, no, we'll walk down.'

This time it was he who scored a point, still clear-minded enough to

The blue salon at Ferrières.

The tapestry room at Ferrières.

ôtel Lambert: the *salon des cuirs* with the Cordoba leather paintings.

Hôtel Lambert: the *cabinet de l'amour* with *The Astrologer* by Vermeer and my great-grandmother Betty's portrait by Ingres.

With Yves Saint-Laurent.

Hôtel Lambert: Marie-Hélène and Professor Lwoff.

Hôtel Lambert: M. and Mme Raymond Barre.

He and she.

Marie-Hélène.

Proust Ball: Princess Maria-Gabriella of Savoy and Sir James Goldsmith.

Proust Ball: Countess Michel de Ganay and Aymeric de Montesquiou-Fezensac.

Marie-Hélène's benefit for the Château de Versailles: Jean de Lipkowski, Princess Grace of Monaco.

Dali the genius is also a gallant gentleman.

Alexis de Redé awaiting his guests at the Oriental Ball.

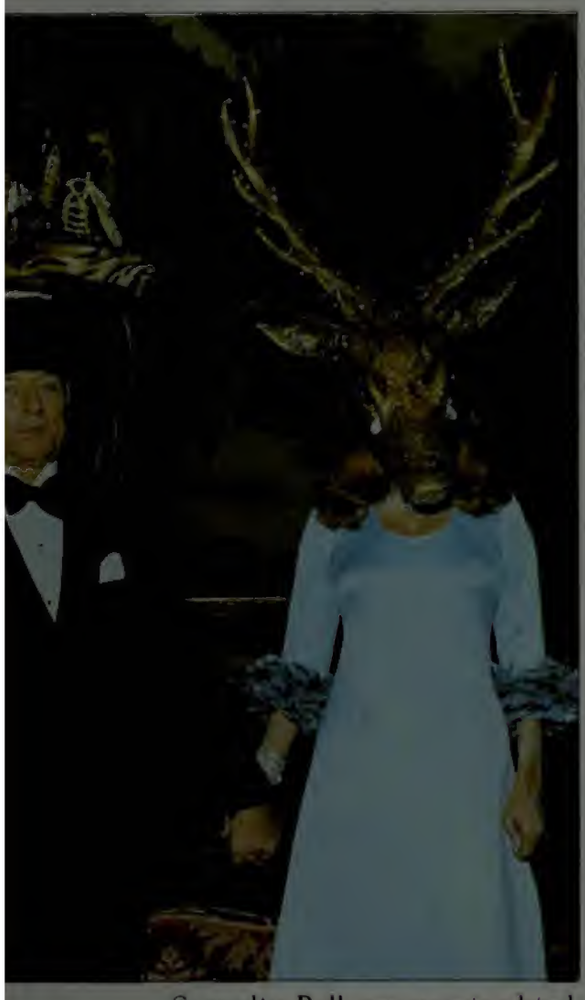
Oriental Ball: Prince Rupert Loewenstein and Mme Cappy Badrutt.

The Surrealist Ball: "table of exotic shoes".

Mme Nina Espirito Santo, the Duke and Duchess de Cadaval: the most surrealistic trio.

Surrealist Ball: "table of the fecund rhinoceros".

Guy Baguenault de Puchesse confused by the two heads of Baroness von Thyssen-Bornemisza.



Surrealist Ball: my weeping hind and myself.

Alexis de Redé's revolving mask, today in the Barcelona Museum.

Marie-Hélène as
"Queen of the Night".

Audrey Hepburn had to open the door of her cage.

Fiancés: Sophie de Ligne and Philippe de Nicolay.

realize that we might have been able to overpower him in the lift.

My brain continued to race at a hundred miles an hour. I had the presence of mind to prevent the masseur from grabbing the suitcase containing the money: the police might have mistaken him for the bandit and grabbed him before the armed man behind me had been put out of action.

'Each of us will hold one of the handles,' I told the masseur, who wanted to carry the ransom alone.

The three of us were now on the staircase. I went down the eight floors without looking round once, despite my apprehension, in order to reinforce the impression of composure I wished to give.

When we reached the ground floor, I spotted a new cause for concern: the head of the Anti-terrorist Squad in conversation with the concierge. I was afraid that our aggressor might realize that I'd deceived him. So I assumed an expression of desperation and marched straight ahead, to emphasize ostensibly the abnormality of my behaviour. Of course, the officer had understood the situation long before; and of course, nothing happened.

The Commissioner told me later that this had been one of the worst moments of his life: having to witness a kidnapping by a man so over-excited that the slightest false move could make him pull the trigger, and being obliged to remain inactive. In a flash he imagined the headlines in the evening papers: 'Anti-terrorist Squad Chief Kills Baron de Rothschild!' So he decided not to act as yet, but to wait for a more propitious moment. He could, of course, have shot the kidnapper in cold blood. But the police don't do that, not before exhausting all other means.

The chauffeur was waiting for us. He got out of the car quite naturally, and politely opened the door.

'What's this?' inquired our man.

'It's a car. My car. You don't think I came on foot, do you?'

'Tell him to go and wait for us further on – there, by that third tree.'

As we were walking towards the little garden, a tempting thought crossed my mind: I might be able to make a dash for it and hide behind a car, thus giving the police a chance to arrest the gangster. I measured the risk – seven or eight yards to cover, that didn't seem too much to me. It may have been the fate of the masseur that prevented me from trying it . . . In any case, I didn't really 'feel' the manœuvre, and in this sort of situation, if one doesn't act instinctively, by reflex, one hasn't a chance.

When we reached the car, I dismissed the masseur, although he insisted on coming with us. But, I don't know why, I had the feeling that I'd be able to handle things better if I were alone with the bandit. He, for once, agreed with me: he didn't want the masseur to come with us either.

I'd succeeded in side-tracking David, his mother, the masseur – alone at last!

The man ordered me to get into the front seat while he settled in the back with the bag beside him, all the while pointing his gun at me.

'Drive to Issy-les-Moulineaux,' he said. 'We'll take a helicopter there.'

Again, I was speechless. I hadn't foreseen this eventuality either! I was petrified, but in order to maintain my air of indifference, I refrained from turning round.

The man then asked if there was a radio in the car. When I said there wasn't, he wanted to stop and buy one.

'What a good idea!' I said, welcoming the chance to avoid ending up in Bordeaux or Timbuctoo or whatever crazy destination this gunman had in mind! I instructed the chauffeur to turn back towards the city.

In a very crowded thoroughfare – I think it was the rue de Passy – I made him double-park in front of an electrical appliance store. I then asked him to go into the shop and buy a radio. At last I was alone with the bandit – unfortunately, one in front of the other instead of face to face. (At this point, I learned later, the police, unable to guess why the chauffeur had left us, became scared and almost intervened.)

When the chauffeur returned with a small transistor radio, I finally turned round. The man was literally dripping with perspiration. Not a very reassuring individual! The police knew better than I that this type of criminal is more dangerous than an experienced outlaw, who is perfectly conscious of what risks he must not take.

Aware that my companion behind was slowly but surely succumbing to his mounting hysteria, I decided to try to calm the fellow. And so I started to talk, to offer him a thousand and one marvellous proposals.

'As you can see, I'm not armed . . . '

'Luckily for me!' he replied, almost with a sigh.

'Now we're going to drive to a subway station,' I said. 'I'll come with you. According to all the best detective novels it's the ideal place for escaping pursuit by mingling with the crowd. No, wait! I've got an even better idea. Let's go to the Galeries Lafayette department store. That will be convenient for me too, because my office is practically next door!'

The man was now drenched with sweat. My little speech, from which I couldn't suppress a slightly flippant tone, only seemed to increase his panic. He had no idea what to do. None of my proposals, not even the most reasonable ones, seemed to suit him. He was literally petrified, paralysed. I think that if the car door had been opened at that moment, he'd have been unable to get out – his legs would have buckled underneath him.

I turned on the radio and tuned into a news programme. Nothing about us. He seemed disappointed.

And so we continued to drive around aimlessly, the idea of the heliport having been jettisoned en route. Then, all of a sudden, the man screamed:

'Stop the car! Now you,' he shouted at me, 'go and tell the Peugeot 404 that's been following us that if he keeps it up I'll shoot.'

'Listen! I'm perfectly willing, but if I have to get out for every Peugeot 404 we meet, there'll be no end to it.'

Again, I'd lacked presence of mind. I should have got out of the car calmly, rejoined the policemen, and never come back! But what would have happened to the chauffeur? Indeed, luxury can have its inconveniences!

We set forth again, like vagrants. And it was now my turn to become irritated.

'Let's get this over with,' I said angrily. To which he replied:

'Let's not get nervous, or we're sunk!'

The comedy was turning into vaudeville! Such an incongruous dialogue could hardly be invented . . .

We were driving along the Quai Branly when we were stopped by a red light. Suddenly all hell broke loose. A terrible racket, a gunshot in my ear, car windows shattering, an outburst of cries: the police were launching an attack. I understood it in the flash of a second and, again, I was afraid that my companion might avenge himself on me. For a moment I didn't move a muscle, not daring to risk the slightest gesture that might appear triumphant. Then I very slowly turned around. The man had already raised his hands in the air, even before the fateful 'Hands up!' shouted very loudly by what seemed to be several voices – part of the technique of intimidation which is based on surprise and terror in order to prevent the bandit from using his gun.

The chauffeur had immediately thrown himself down on the floor. Behind me, the man hadn't had time to make a move: windows smashed by revolver butts, blows and orders hammering him from all sides! His finger hadn't had time to tighten on the trigger – fortunately, because (as the policemen told me afterwards) the safety catch had been removed. They also informed me that the bandit had already lost control and fired a shot as he was menacing David. His hand must have been shaking, because the bullet was embedded in the rug at David's feet. I then could understand my son's nervousness even better, in the face of an individual who had already given in to panic.

Police headquarters had been following the operation via radio; when they were afraid of losing me in the heavy traffic, the Chief ordered the attack: five men had rushed in one bunch! On the pavement, my enemy lay unconscious. He'd been subdued with no kid gloves, and I felt a weird kind of jubilation.

What would have happened if the police had lost track of us in the traffic?

Everything was possible. We were floundering in an ocean of delirium. I don't believe the man would have fired. He might have ended up by begging me to save him, returning the money and asking for a job at the rue Laffitte! He might have passed out or become hysterical . . . because he was visibly in a trance and had completely lost control of himself. He probably hadn't slept all night, and had certainly been living under extreme tension for several hours. I might even have been able to arrest him all by myself. 'You don't want to kill me, so give me your gun. I don't want to kill you either. You'll be free to escape at last.'

I too had passed through several phases. The first fever of excitement had been followed by a feeling of optimism as we were leaving the apartment. Then fear again, observing the panic of the man who no longer knew what he was doing. Finally, as he gradually changed from menacing to clinging, my problem could be summed up in a single question: 'How to get rid of him?' The tiger seated behind me may have turned into a big cat, but he still deprived me of all freedom of action.

The police helped me out of the car littered with broken glass, accompanied me to a chemist – flying glass had injured the cornea of an eye – and I returned to the rue Laffitte a hero. My cousins hugged me, brought me a stiff whisky, while my little dog Pinka was at her wit's end. (It seems that she had howled all morning, undoubtedly sensing from the nervousness of my secretaries that something abnormal was going on . . .)

I phoned David. He already knew everything, having followed the operations with Commissioner Le Mouel, who had been in permanent contact with Commissioner Bouvier. I next called the Chief of Police, who gave me an account of the operations from the Headquarters' point of view. ('It was risky,' he told me, 'a bullet was already in the barrel.')

Then I telephoned Marie-Hélène, who knew nothing of what had happened. It seems I was so over-excited that I talked a mile a minute and she couldn't understand a word I said!

My phone started to ring and continued non-stop all day long, beginning with Georges Pompidou, the President of France, who had also been following the adventure step by step. And all day long I felt the same over-excitement, as I repeated a hundred times the same details to friends who called from everywhere, listened to the radio commentaries, yielded to the insistence of the journalists by holding a brief televised press conference. This lasted till the following day, when all the newspapers headlined the event.

When the case came to court one year later, my testimony caused hilarity in the courtroom: I couldn't prevent myself from telling the story in an ironic manner, stressing the ridiculous and surrealistic elements of the situation – as they appeared from that distance in time. The accused was a first offender, of Polish origin. He'd become 'all worked up' by an article he'd read in the *Canard Enchaîné* which, as usual, was taking it out on the Rothschilds yet again . . .

A few days before the trial, one of his sisters paid me a visit in order to plead his cause. She was the living image of a Dostoevsky heroine: a bit stout, an ash-white face, concentrated, intense, burning with sisterly love, she spoke in a sweet, calm little voice, and finally persuaded me not to be a party to the charge (leaving it to the State).

The young man's lawyers had a field day, outdoing each other, pleading that it was only a case of 'Elmer' in the house of the rich.

Seen from a distance, it was really funny: David in his strawberry dressing-gown trying to convince the pale young man, encumbered by his gun! The bandit, when the bullet accidentally pierced the carpet, apologizing profusely! The masseur and his 200 pounds of useless muscle! The cook and nanny, pacing the hall, lamenting the misfortune of poor David, with never a thought of notifying the police! And all the while, Alix, my son's mother, in bed telephoning friends, seeking moral support, afraid to call the police! (She imagined the traditional Black Maria arriving with sirens at full blast, to make sure the gangster was alerted!) And myself, with my facetious remarks, masking my extreme nervous tension!

During the trial, the culprit admitted he hadn't suspected for a moment that I was afraid. He made this wonderful remark: 'Monsieur le Baron was calm . . . much too calm!'

Thanks to our moderation, he left the courtroom guilty but reprieved – in other words, a free man.

During the next few years at Christmas time, he never failed to send me his 'best wishes' . . . to which I always responded with my own, sincerely cordial.

CHAPTER

18

Noble Destiny

My father inherited from his ancestors a deep devotion to Judaism. Apart from the Sabbath (I've already mentioned the fact that he never went shooting or raced one of his horses on a Saturday), he observed the principal Jewish holidays, more out of respect for tradition than from religious zeal. He never failed to attend the services of Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Passover . . . And in my youth, on the eve of Yom Kippur, after the dinner preceding the fast, he'd always make me walk to the synagogue on the rue de la Victoire with him, wearing a tailcoat, white tie and a silk top hat, to the astonishment of passers-by.

When I was thirteen, we naturally celebrated my Bar Mitzvah. It was an elaborate ceremony (during which, I regret to say, I sang my part in the ritual terribly out of tune).

I well remember the Seder dinner, the evening before Passover (a feast commemorating the Hebrews' exodus from Egypt in 1500 BC), when the entire family used to gather together. Apart from the emotion I felt when I was called upon to recite the 'Manish Tana',* I could vaguely sense the hidden symbolism of the various rituals that accompany the ceremony.

Traditionally, several symbolic objects are placed in the centre of the table, in front of the head of the family: a lamb bone (in memory of the lamb the Hebrews sacrificed on the eve of the death of the first-born Egyptian sons, 'the tenth wound'); three matzoth, unleavened bread (commemorating the Hebrews' hasty flight from Egypt when they were driven into exile by the Pharaoh); bitter herbs, such as horseradish (recalling the severity of their slavery in Egypt); a paste made of mashed dates and figs (evoking the mortar the Hebrews had to mix in order to build the pyramids); and an egg (which, having neither a beginning nor an end, is infinite, thus symbolizing eternity and the hope of eternal rebirth).

Seder was an occasion for all of us to be together in a gay and cheerful

* At the end of the meal, while the head of the family reads the Haggadah – the story of the Exodus – the youngest male member asks him a series of questions about the meaning of the celebration.

mood. We'd sing in chorus a joyful hymn of praise to God, the 'hallel' (from which the word 'Alleluia' is derived). After which, for eight days, we ate only unleavened bread.

And, of course, during my entire childhood, after my Bar Mitzvah, I observed the fast of Yom Kippur.

But above all, my father was conscious of his responsibility to the Jewish community. Throughout his life, he presided over the principal Jewish organization in France, the 'Consistoire Central';* and as soon as the Nazi persecutions started in Germany, he devoted much of his energy to helping Jewish refugees.

The most important rule in my parents' minds, of which I was reminded at every opportunity, was the one forbidding marriage with a woman who was not Jewish, or not willing to be converted to the Jewish faith. While I have strayed from these teachings later on in life, they were nevertheless constantly repeated to me during my youth.

The outbreak of anti-semitism in France before the war, stimulated by the example of the Germans and intensified by hatred for the Popular Front, confirmed my sense of responsibility towards my fellow Jews in the tradition of my family, which had always assumed it. The painful experience of Vichy and of the Statute of Jews further reinforced my sense of solidarity, as did the gradual revelation of the martyrdom in Nazi camps.

I returned to the synagogue on the rue de la Victoire in 1944, a few weeks after the Liberation of Paris, on the occasion of Yom Kippur. It was the first time I'd been there for four years. Few people were there. Those present had barely emerged from hiding, and the places of all the missing were empty . . . I couldn't help recalling the faces of those who should have been among us and who would never return. The living, shadow-like, next to phantoms of the dead . . . I was overwhelmed with emotion. There was something strangely unreal about it, something terrible, almost unbearable. A poignant evocation of 'the horror of horrors'.

Shortly after the war, a united organization was created in France, following the example and with the aid of Jewish institutions in America, in order to centralize all of the charitable and cultural activities of our community and at the same time to ensure their financial support. The first president of this 'Fonds Social Juif Unifié' was Léon Meiss, whose underground activities during the Occupation had been praiseworthy. I succeeded him two or three years later, and assumed this responsibility for

* The 'Consistoire Central' is the lay organization which subsidizes the Rabinnic school and synagogues. It was founded in 1905, as were comparable institutions by other religious cults, when a law was passed in France separating the Church and State.

more than thirty years, until April 1982.

The FSJU grouped together representatives of all of the political, religious and cultural aspects of French Jewry; it was essential to maintain an even balance between all the conflicting groups in order to preserve some form of unity, and especially to ensure that all major decisions were accepted by a large majority of opinion as representing the general interest of the community. In addition to the problems concerning the community itself, this office which I held so long also obliged me to face political problems, sometimes advocating vigorous action, sometimes restraint.

For example, in 1955 a Catholic priest provoked an outcry by refusing to return to their family, who had survived deportation, the two Finaly children whom he had hidden and cared for during the war, no doubt hoping to convert them. Several members of my board at the FSJU thought the affair was the beginning of renewed persecution of the Jews, and I had all the trouble in the world trying to restrain their ill-advised excitement. I published a statement, widely reproduced, in which I said that we couldn't accept the reality of ritual kidnapping in place of the old false accusations of ritual murder. I gave full support to Chief Rabbi Kaplan, who skilfully negotiated with an embarrassed and mainly innocent Catholic hierarchy. The children were returned to their family.

In the early 1960s, the great problem was the massive return to France of the 150,000 Algerian Jews – not to mention those from Morocco and Tunisia. The Fonds Social managed to mobilize the resources in men and money required to receive them, house them, and facilitate their economic and cultural integration.

In 1967, as relations between Israel and Nasser became increasingly tense, it seemed obvious that de Gaulle, who was opposed to a military solution of the conflict, was preparing to reverse the traditional policy of Franco-Israeli alliance. Believing it my duty to take some action, I went to the Elysée one Saturday morning (the day before the Six Day War broke out) for a private meeting with Etienne Burin des Roziers, the President's Secretary General. The Elysée palace seemed deserted, but I knew the General was there because he interrupted our conversation twice, summoning his aide to his office. I explained to Burin des Roziers that while I could understand de Gaulle's motivation, I felt obliged to warn him of the inevitable reaction of the French Jewish community. Every member would recall the fact that the General had never made a gesture to acknowledge the specific, if not major, place occupied by Jews among the French martyrs; the fact that he had been absent from the inauguration of the reconstructed synagogue of Strasbourg; that (in spite of my insistent invitations) he hadn't attended the inauguration in Paris of the Monu-

ment to the Unknown Jewish Martyr. 'All this will add up', I told my astonished friend, who promised to make a report of our interview. But it was wasted effort. Shortly afterwards, de Gaulle described the Jewish people as 'dominating and sure of themselves', which didn't help matters.

Simultaneously, during the crisis preceding the Six Day War, I tried to convince Georges Pompidou, who was then Prime Minister, that the closing of the strait of Tiran, as insignificant as its maritime traffic might be, certainly constituted a *casus belli* for Israel. Once the military operations had been launched, Pompidou authorized Pierre Messmer, Minister of the Armed Forces, to delay the embargo for a few hours in order to allow the final shipments of arms to Israel, whose only supplier at that time was France. I learned then that the Israeli plan of operations had been prepared in consultation with the French General Staff, which was following developments minute by minute and keeping the Minister informed in advance of the probable outcome of events.

As for Georges Pompidou's political position concerning Israel and his personal sentiments, I summarized them in an article published in *Le Monde* in April 1974, a few days after he died:

> . . . We often discussed the Middle East and Israel, and I regret that Jewish opinion has often misunderstood or misinterpreted his views.
>
> Essentially liberal, utterly devoid of intolerance, his lack of anti-semitism was as solid as a rock. For example, hardly had his anger, aroused by the hostile demonstration of the Jews in Chicago, died down, he took great care to make it clear that he didn't feel the slightest resentment towards the French Jews, and that 'while their hearts may beat for Israel, they were French hearts'.
>
> He was sympathetic towards Israel. During the Six Day War, he delayed as long as possible the embargo which the Foreign Ministry wanted to apply even before it had been officially decreed by de Gaulle. On the other hand, reared on history and classics, Pompidou failed to appreciate the explosive fervour of Zionism, nor to understand the romantic and revolutionary content of the epic which, between 1945 and 1948, led to Jewish liberation and the Independence of Israel. The serious, reasonable statesman expected Israel to behave like a long-established power. Since he hadn't noticed the course of events that instilled in Israel a roughness typical of a recently emancipated nation, he was shocked by certain incidents, among which the affair of the vedettes of Cherbourg was undoubtedly for him the most distressing.
>
> As to foreign policy, Pompidou shared de Gaulle's belief that Israel, embedded in an Arab world which vastly outnumbered her, could not survive by force, but only by being accepted. In his opinion, nothing should be spared in order to achieve this, neither means nor time; he hoped that Israel would show the same moderation and restraint that France had endeavoured to apply in dealing with the peoples of her former colonies.
>
> The lessons of the Yom Kippur War in no way contradicted this opinion. While Georges Pompidou may have underestimated the intolerable nervous

tension imposed on Israel, it was due (and I can bear witness to it) neither to absence of sympathy nor to indifference for her future . . .

During the presidential campaign of 1981 and following serious anti-semitic outbreaks, such as the murderous bombing of the synagogue on the rue Copernic, a group of Jewish activists became very agitated, claiming that those responsible for the community were too indulgent towards the government. They were, of course, free to express their opinion, but I considered their criticism quite unfair. Furthermore, this same faction recommended a vote of sanction against the retiring administration, in an attempt to create a 'Jewish lobby'. Finally, it seized every opportunity to flaunt its unconditional backing for Israel, to the point of irritating even her supporters. If, as was seen after the Copernic tragedy, such an outrage inspires some people to rally behind the Israeli flag, it will shock many Jews, equally ardent defenders of Israel, but who consider themselves French and refuse to be viewed as members of an Israeli colony living in Paris. It's not a question of hiding our sentiments or of offering only lukewarm support to Israel; it's a question of independent, responsible citizens remaining free in their opinions and conserving their identity. On that particular occasion, I felt obliged to publicly reaffirm the sensible position of the majority of French Jews.

After the Copernic bombing, there was much talk of anti-semitism in France, comparing our country to Eastern European nations, accusing France of being lenient in the face of a revival of anti-semitic attitudes. There too, the criticism is unfair. Few people realize that Jewish schools in France are subsidized by the government, an almost unique situation in the world; even more extraordinary is the fact that military service accomplished in Israel exempts French citizens from military service in France. And if the world will have to witness a tragic alliance between anti-Zionist Palestinian extremists and neo-Nazi or Red terrorist groups, France will certainly not be the only nation to be endangered by it.

No more than any other was my family immune from anti-semitism at the time of the Dreyfus affair. Drumont, in his newspaper *La Libre Parole*, really let loose. I'll quote only two or three of his attacks, because they defy the imagination. As I've mentioned, my grandfather Alphonse voluntarily severed relations with his best client, Tsarist Russia, refusing to have anything to do with a régime guilty of bloody pogroms. Drumont described as 'infamy' this act of solidarity: ' . . . the Rothschilds never flinched at this betrayal. They had only one goal: to come to the aid of their fellow Jews in Russia.'

The most puerile anti-semitic insults as to the 'miserable' origins of my

family ('descendants of the former pawn-broker pursued through villages by barking dogs . . . the descendants of the louse-ridden junk dealer of Frankfurt') – were shamelessly followed by attacks on 'their monstrous fortune', 'their enormous capital, like thousands of bloodsuckers . . . The international banks of the Rothschilds where the fortunes of kings and nations are piled up, one on top of the other . . . '

The eternal hatred of the foreigner ('the barbarian roughness of the voracious, bloodthirsty German Jew'), encouraged the scornful allegation of the mythical power of gold: 'The man-without-a-country Rothschild runs the Bank of France, he is more powerful than the Ministers of State, than the President of the Republic, than Parliament itself.'

As one can see, all of the familiar themes were there; they haven't changed much.

And it gets even better! Hatred is blind and impervious to contradiction: 'Rothschild was in the Commune as he was in Opportunism, as he was in Anarchy, as he was in Socialism, as he was in everything'. Nor does blind hatred fear ridicule: when history was unable to supply grounds for treason, Drumont didn't let that stop him: the Rothschilds were in no way involved in the Panama affair, one of the biggest financial scandals of the 19th century. 'Their name doesn't appear simply because they were hostile to Panama (!). And they were hostile to Panama because in all things and at all times, these German Jews are against France'!

Anti-semitism has played such an important role in Jewish history that (perhaps with a trace of masochism) we cannot resist conserving a few tangible souvenirs of it. Personally, I have a framed cartoon by Sem showing my grandparents, Alphonse and Laurie, walking down the promenade in Deauville, alone, old, bent, along the deserted beach dotted with a few empty chairs. It was during the Dreyfus affair, and the cartoonist's idea was to demonstrate that everyone was running away as they approached, so as not to have to greet them.

Robert Badinter, subsequently Mitterand's Minister of Justice, once gave me a copy of *La Libre Parole* dated December 1905, devoted to the death of Alphonse, who is referred to as 'The Gold King' – one can imagine the style. For no logical reason, I've also kept this document, if I may say, 'as a souvenir'.

On the whole, my family had always adopted a reserved attitude towards Zionism; my great-uncle Edmond had acted on his own in generously supporting Jewish Palestine, and that was more humanitarian and religious than political.

But the earthquake caused by the war and the extermination of six million Jews radically changed all of our former attitudes. The idea of a

Jewish homeland acquired an intense emotional appeal; I myself became an ardent Zionist, without however envisaging a change of direction in my personal life or that of my family. The word 'Zionist' can thus lead to confusion, because it designates a person prepared to immigrate to Israel as well as a supporter of the State of Israel.

In 1945, I made a trip to the Middle East with an official mission to report my findings. On that occasion I met Ben Gourion for the first time in Jerusalem; he asked me if I was a Zionist. (He was a man who appreciated precision.) As I hesitated to reply, he added:

'Do you want to bring up your son here?'

Not wishing to disappoint him, I replied negatively, and the subject was dropped.

I spent two weeks in Palestine visiting the different Jewish settlements, and in particular numerous Kibbutzim. Each of them had its individual character, political and geographical; but despite the denials of their officials, I found them all rather intolerant – for example, in the refusal of each one to accept members of a different origin than their own.

I celebrated the Seder in a kibbutz of Yugoslav immigrants, 'Ein Gev', on the banks of Lake Tiberiade, with Arthur Koestler, who had also just arrived in Palestine, and a young man, Teddy Kollek, now the famous mayor of Jerusalem, surrounded by a crowd dancing the Horah; we thus started a life-long friendship.

During the same trip, which also took me to Cairo, I met a most able and fascinating officer of the French Intelligence Service, who explained to me his pessimistic outlook as to French interests in that part of the world.

The return plane trip lasted three days, with stop-overs in Benghazi, Tunis, Algiers – a measure of the progress in time and speed since then! With the perceptive information I'd gathered in Cairo, added to my personal observations on the spot, I prepared a report for the Ministry responsible for my trip. In it I explained how and why it seemed evident to me that France was doomed to lose Syria and Lebanon in the very near future. Nobody took any notice of my forecast – if, indeed, anybody even bothered to read my report. A few weeks later, events confirmed my prediction, but I felt no satisfaction in seeing it come true.

On my return, I shared with my English friends in London my enthusiasm for the kibbutz way of life, which succeeds in eliminating money while still giving its members freedom and happiness (or so it seems). It is certainly an exciting experiment, unfortunately valid only in special, very limited circumstances. The Zionist dream at the time identified itself with Israel: a national home for the Jewish people, a just and democratic society, a pioneer spirit, a passionate quest for a new set of values. The negative aspects of the experience would appear only later.

From then on, the struggle of the Jewish survivors trying to rebuild their lives in Palestine became increasingly dramatic. I followed events with keen interest, and like many others I was shocked by its tragic episodes, such as the odyssey of the Exodus.

I once had a chance to intervene. André Blumel, former Secretary General of Léon Blum's cabinet and a friend of mine, asked me to help him save Léa Knout, who was being sought for terrorism. I did so willingly, and have remained in contact with her ever since; today she leads the peaceful life of a delightful wife and mother.

On the day of Israel's Declaration of Independence in May 1948, Alix and I expressed our enthusiasm, marching arm in arm up the Champs-Elysées along with Madame Mendès-France, whom we happened to meet in the crowd.

Jews throughout the world are concerned by the future of Israel, its security, its reputation. The existence of a Jewish nation plays an essential role in our ability to overcome the complex which two thousand years of anti-semitism have implanted in us. A Jew bears a special burden in life, created by the awareness that some people despise him, some express insulting judgements as to his condition, his loyalty, his belonging to the national community. It's no use shrugging one's shoulders and saying that all one has to do is to ignore one's enemies; everyone wants to be respected, accepted, loved – if possible, admired. Every Jew knows of the hatred and persecution suffered by his brothers in the past – and even still today – as retribution for crimes that we have never committed.

Israel's Declaration of Independence, the birth of the Jewish nation, the 'normalization' of the population, have decolonized not only the Palestinian Jews, but also, emotionally and psychologically, millions of Jews of the Diaspora. They feel liberated from the stigma borne for centuries. Anti-semitism can still cause them great harm; but it cannot so easily affect their morale. We, the Jews of the Diaspora, are proud of the Israelis, of their courage and military valour. After centuries of humiliation, Jewish honour and dignity have been proven to the world. We are now less vulnerable to hostility, to doubts concerning our acceptance by others, to the fear of still another tragedy befalling us. Israel is not our country, its flag is not our flag; but Israel is the liberator of part of our inner ego. We need only imagine how much we would despair of ourselves and of humanity if Israel were to be destroyed, for us to appreciate the extent of our emotional attachment to this small nation and to what it symbolizes.

The lightning victory that brought an end to the Six Day War completely altered Israel's relationship with the rest of the world. A few days later, I had lunch with four particularly reactionary elderly

gentlemen. They were jubilant! Extremely hostile to de Gaulle, whom they couldn't forgive for having granted independence to Algeria, they were finally getting their revenge on the Arabs – via the Israelis! All means are good for satisfying an enduring hatred.

The lamb had turned into a lion; the weak had arisen strong. Those for whom one feared the worst achieved victory with astonishing ease and brilliance. The Jews, and particularly the Israelis, were then confronted by an entirely new and unforeseen situation. During the weeks following the 1967 victory, my sister Bethsabée, who lives in Tel-Aviv, came to Paris, and I remember telling her:

'Israel should immediately withdraw from the West Bank of the Jordan. For two reasons: first, for two thousand years the Jews have suffered from the oppression of most of the peoples with whom they've been in contact; and it seems inconceivable to me, for the dignity and honour of Israel, that a Jewish army or government should now play the opposite role and appear to be the oppressor, against whom a resistance movement will inevitably arise.

'Secondly, Israel is a small country which will always depend more or less on the United States or some other highly industrialized country. If the West, weary of Arab hostility, were ever to withdraw its support from Israel, then Israel would be forced to return within its frontiers, a humiliation which would counteract all the benefits of its brilliant victory.

'I might add that if the ethics of our time and the pressure of public opinion could prevent the United States from doing what was necessary to achieve victory in Vietnam, what chance would Israel have?'

In 1969 I returned to Israel and held forth the same argument to Dayan, who simply brushed it away; then to Levi Eshkol, the Prime Minister, who kept me for an hour trying to convince me: he appreciated the validity of my analysis, but said he was unable to change his policy. I maintained that if a single Arab soldier (who could only have been Jordanian at that time) penetrated into Trans-Jordan, any Israeli unit would be capable of putting things in order.

Levi Eshkol, changing the subject, asked me with a certain premonition if there would be a change of French policy in the eventuality of Georges Pompidou replacing General de Gaulle as President. I explained to him why no government could fundamentally reverse the French policy: it was vital for France to maintain good relations with the North African governments so that no hostile military bases would be established facing our Mediterranean coast. When Levi Eshkol's posthumous memoranda were published, I found in them an account of this portion of our conversation and of his disappointment in my predictions – which ensuing events were to prove exact.

I was so convinced of the danger Israel risked by a prolonged occupation

of the Right Bank of the Jordan and of the psychological and diplomatic damage it would suffer, that I jokingly suggested to Levi Eshkol that perhaps he ought to appoint an Arab Foreign Minister, whose gift for propaganda would undoubtedly be superior to that of a Jew!

If it had been militarily possible to evacuate the Right Bank of the Jordan at a time when the PLO was still insignificant, Israel would have given the world a unique demonstration of idealism and morality. Instinctively, every Jew would like to find in the conduct of the Israeli government an exemplary ethic. However, it isn't up to the Jews of the Diaspora to dictate Israeli policy; only those whose lives are at stake have the right to participate in the vital decisions concerning the future of their country.

Levi Eshkol died two months after our meeting. He was replaced by Golda Meir who, virtuous and admirable as she may have been, made no progress towards a solution of the problem.

During another trip to Israel I attended a dinner at the Knesset. One of the members of this parliamentary body gave a speech in which he mentioned a recent incident during which a group of Palestinian raiders had been annihilated. He added with a smugness I found most irritating: 'This will show the world how we treat Arab terrorists.' It was my duty to reply. After the usual compliments, I suggested that he also show the world how Israel treated non-terrorist Arabs. I learned afterwards that he remarked to his neighbour, my associate: 'I didn't know that Rothschild was a Communist.'

To tell the truth, neither did I!

The Palestinian problem is a terrible thorn in the side of Israel and proves, alas! that it is just as great a trial to occupy a territory as it is to be occupied.

The Six Day War and that of Kippur are already past history; the war in Lebanon is still a current event.*

Until then, Israel maintained the image of a tiny nation struggling against a huge enemy coalition, facing serious economic and social problems, all the while trying to live up to democratic ideals of justice and virtue. Her military triumphs certainly transformed the vulnerable lamb into something of an invincible lion, and some aspects of its Arab policy certainly caused serious reservations. But to many people, her image nevertheless remained intact.

Today, the invasion of Lebanon has shocked the entire world; some friends of Israel, Jews and non-Jews, have gone so far as to reconsider their

* This chapter was written after the fall of Beirut and before the report of the investigating committee regarding the massacres in the camps of Sabra and Chatila. It has not been revised since.

devotion to her. Israel seemed brutal and cold-blooded. For the first time, her army had been used not for defence but for aggression. The media have shown heart-breaking scenes of the extensive destruction, stressing the tragic number of civilian casualties. The Israeli government also laid itself open to criticism in making the error of announcing 'limited operations for the protection of its frontier zone' – and then immediately invalidating the declaration by marching on Beirut.

We've seen how Soviet-inspired propaganda, with its usual escalation of verbal excess, has exploited these events. The facts are undeniable. But their presentation has often been biased; the conclusions drawn from them are unfounded. Refusing to recognize the constant efforts of the Israeli army to limit civilian casualties is just as unfair as denying the importance of the strictly military installations the Palestinians deliberately installed in the heart of the residential sections of West Beirut.

Some have tried to make out that this war was an anti-terrorist action – as if the Israelis were ignorant of what everyone else knows: that no country has ever succeeded in suppressing a nationalistic rebellion by force. This is really underestimating their military leaders, whose talent and efficiency has inspired world-wide admiration. Another fact has been too easily forgotten: that Lebanon was no longer a sovereign nation, in any sense of the term, but a territory occupied by two armed forces hostile to Israel, one of which was guilty of repeated acts of aggression against her.

It was at this point that a terrible tragedy occurred, a few weeks after the fighting had ceased. Hundreds of helpless men, women and children were murdered by the Lebanese Christians in the camps of Sabra and Chatila, while the Israeli army did nothing at all to stop them. The army was too close to the camps, the warnings to the Israeli government too often repeated (as was learned later) to consider it innocent in the sinister affair. The Israeli population was certainly conscious of it, as it reacted violently and in a manner worthy of what we expected: demanding the creation of an investigating committee, which summoned as witnesses the Prime Minister, the Defence Minister and many Army officers. Alas, committees can't resuscitate the innocent dead; and the numerous murders previously committed by the Palestinians cannot serve as an excuse for anyone concerned.

Israel will obtain peace only through moderation; she could destroy herself by being in the wrong, which does not necessarily condemn her to a bleating, angelic purity. In fact, it is the first time in her history that her leaders have been confronted with such a difficult moral dilemma: having to choose between what they can do and what they decide they can't do.

Whatever one's opinion of the Begin government, and whatever may have been its objectives in launching the war in Lebanon, one can judge

by the results: a fundamental success obtained, and a fundamental problem unsolved – two elements that must be clearly differentiated. The enforced departure of Arafat's troops upset the balance of forces in the Middle East to the advantage of the West. Lebanon is liberated, and the evacuation of foreign armies should be able to be achieved by diplomatic means. The Russians have lost their outposts in Lebanon. Hussein of Jordan can no longer evade responsibility and will have to make some constructive contribution. The risk of war in this part of the world is henceforth greatly diminished.

On the other hand, nothing has been settled concerning the fate of the Palestinians. For several years now, they have become increasingly conscious of their national identity; the problem of their future should not be treated lightly, and even less with contempt: it merits our respect and sympathy. Recommending a solution when so many wise men have failed would be pretentious. But one thing is sure: there is a great desire among the Jewish people to see Israel give proof of its imagination and generosity, while not however neglecting its own vital interests. The Jews rejoice when Israel plays a noble role. Alas, there's no room for sentiment in politics; moreover, it clearly doesn't flourish on either bank of the river Jordan.

For two thousand years the Jews have prayed for a return to Jerusalem, one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Since the beginning of time it has been the symbol of their past; today, as the site of the institutions and ceremonies of a democratic state, it is the symbol of their national sovereignty. It is there that the holocaust is commemorated forever by the sanctuary of Yad Vashem, a grotto whose sombre simplicity alone is worthy of honouring and preserving the memory of the millions of lives that ended in suffering, in terror, in horror. A poignant reminder which overwhelms me with emotion every time I return there.

Nothing to do with the Jewish people follows a normal course, and the brief history of the State of Israel is no exception. What other new-born nation has had to fight and win three wars in thirty years, integrate a host of immigrants that quintupled its population, create a scientific agriculture, forge an industry as advanced as any?

During her brief existence, Israel has succeeded in overcoming her growing pains and in transforming a haven for immigrants into an adult democracy, diplomatically responsible, sometimes even capable of imposing on itself the difficult self-discipline of restraint.

But even more is demanded of her: an inordinate amount of trust so that she can place her future survival at the mercy of aggressive neighbours who have never ceased to plot her ruin; when she hesitates to take such a step,

Israel encounters only impatience and incomprehension from those who hardly practice what they preach to others.

Is there no limit to what is expected of 'the chosen people'? How exacting is this burden to be . . . ?

CHAPTER

19

Adieu Rothschild

On 21 May 1981 (my birthday!), François Mitterand, the newly-elected President of France, moved into the Elysée palace.

During the presidential campaign, I hadn't believed in the nationalization of the banks. While the measure figured prominently in the Common Programme of the Socialist-Communist coalition of 1978, the rupture of that alliance as well as its defeat in the parliamentary elections seemed logically to involve the abandonment of its Marxist-inspired resolutions. In fact, Mitterand's 1981 presidential campaign was waged on a note of moderation, under the slogan: 'Tranquil Strength'. I must admit I was greatly surprised to hear him announce during his televised debate with Giscard d'Estaing his intention to nationalize the banks. It seemed incredible to me that even in a Socialist economy, anyone would try to remove the banking industry from the competitive sector, to take the risk of turning it into an administration like the Post Office. My disbelief was cruelly belied. Once he was elected, Mitterand scrupulously set out to fulfil the promise he had made on television.

The uninitiated reader may be surprised to learn that the governmental banking sector (three nationalized establishments, plus the Crédit Agricole, the Bank of France, the Savings banks, the Treasury, the Mutual banks) already collected 86.5 per cent of the deposits in France and issued more than 80 per cent of the loans! The private sector, whose existence was intolerable to François Mitterand, thus represented only 13.5 per cent of the deposits and 20 per cent of the loans – even less, if one takes into account the fact that foreign-owned banks (which the Socialists fortunately didn't dare to touch) represented about a quarter of these already very minor percentages.

But that's not all. The Minister of Finance and the Bank of France had already introduced a whole series of rulings: a ceiling on authorized credits, for example, and incentives favouring certain sectors of the economy – so that in actual practice there was no profession in France which was as closely controlled as banking. What was the point then in proceeding to

nationalization – a spectacular move, but also futile and costly? Furthermore (an aggravating circumstance) one which has in principle long since been abandoned by all the Socialist parties in other industrialized nations?

The truth of the matter is perfectly evident: banks are depicted in Socialist mythology as the Temple of Money, the abhorred symbol of capitalism. No need to justify their appropriation: it's an act of faith. It's evidence of the determination to destroy a form of economy and society founded on private property and freedom of enterprise.

In December 1977, Monsieur Mitterand and his friends, then in opposition, had already proposed a law whose preamble began as follows: 'In order to break the domination of big capitalism . . . we must transfer to the collective the financial instruments now in the hands of dominant capitalist groups.'

The negligible share that private French banks held in the total financial activity of our country earned such slogans as 'big capitalism' and 'capitalistic domination' . . . even without having to take into account the recognized quality of management of the banking establishments concerned.

In order to justify their policies, prominent members of the new regime frequently resorted to some staggering statements. A few samples:

'Stifled by the great financial powers, they [industrial enterprises] are in a state of stagnation voluntarily created by the former; we will free them.' (Bérégovoy)

' . . . put an end to the bureaucratization and State control over industry . . . '

'Permit small and medium-sized industries to develop and thus escape from their vocation of sausage-meat for big capitalism.' (One can hardly believe that these words were pronounced by François Mitterand who is, however, not so interested in industry: it's the banks that he resents. 'Blum died fighting the fortress of money, I want to avenge his memory,' he's reported to have often said.

The encyclopaedic ignorance of the Left in matters of economics is a constant of French political life, as is its subservience to an outdated ideology. Of course, every society needs a generous inspiration. Unfortunately, social justice and progress cannot be achieved by taking 19th-century literature as the Bible, and even less by opening the gates to Communist infiltration on every level of public administration and economic activity.

The Left doesn't lack men of talent. It's surprising that they don't succeed in extricating themselves from a vicious circle which finally gives their opponents a monopoly on economic progress, on raising the standard

of living, on a quality of management – which, despite its shortcomings, compares honourably to that of countries similar to our own. The Left, instead of ideas, has an ideology; the Right is more pragmatic, but at least it sometimes manages to make itself useful to the country. And there's no point in trying to revive the ghost of the reactionaries; it's been a long time since they have played a role in our political life.

As for the nationalizations in the industrial sector, nothing can justify them, and the success of Renault (which one must look at more closely to perceive its limitations) cannot be used as evidence in support of the subordination of major industry to political power. Every government will always be tempted to make nationalized industries solve its own problems, instead of theirs. And there's no reason to believe that cabinet Ministers or civil servants have clearer vision or more expert judgement than the managers they've just dismissed.

As for the banks: as everyone knows, they are already obliged to grant credit to the nationalized sectors and no doubt will have to make a lot of dubious loans in the future. Their international credit rating, which before was highly regarded, is already being revised, and their profits cannot possibly increase. In the long run, the government will take advantage of its monopoly to impose increasingly costly banking services on the public, in an endeavour to balance our financial institutions. On the other hand, it might, in view of its demagogic policy, oblige the banks to borrow at high rates and lend cheap, thereby creating a deficit which will finally have to be made up by the taxpayers. In any case, the day is gradually approaching when it will require political influence rather than financial guarantees to obtain a loan from a reticent banker.

The French Socialists want to take total control of everything; they are jealous even of the tiny fragments of power that might remain in the hands of the managers of the big private industries. They can tolerate only medium-sized or small (not to say 'mediocre') enterprises. Perhaps this tendency will spread throughout the western world, but nothing could be less certain. As the economic and moral failure of Marxism becomes more apparent every day, we will either have to choose between a form of Socialism without dictatorship and a free enterprise regime, or we'll have to invent something new. The choice has not yet been made. But history has proven only too clearly that humanity often ends up precisely where it didn't want to go.

I first had to overcome my surprise before I could realize and react to the extent of the disaster the nationalizations represented for my family. Rather than give in to depression, I preferred to be angry – which is psychologically more positive. It seemed to me inconceivable that this

gigantic expropriation of a list of more or less anonymous important banks should also cause the disappearance of Rothschild, whose connotation is both historical and mythical, without anybody's noticing or paying attention to it. I took up my pen and wrote an article entitled 'Adieu Rothschild', which was printed on the front page of *Le Monde*. The public reaction surpassed my expectations. I received hundreds of expressions of sympathy and approval, most of them trying to be encouraging and ending with: 'Not adieu, but au revoir, Rothschild'; many said: 'Hoping to see you soon, Rothschild', or 'Thank you, Rothschild'. All of them congratulated me for having been virtually the only member of my profession to have responded 'with courage and dignity'.

ADIEU ROTHSCHILD

A family whose name is associated with an eminently capitalistic banking establishment could only see the scope of its activities gradually shrink at every stage of the socialization that France has experienced during the course of the 20th century. The Rothschilds have been affected by each of these stages: the Popular Front of 1936 ousted them from the management of the Chemin du Fer du Nord, which they had run since 1857; it ousted my father from a directorship of the Bank of France, which he had held for twenty years.

After the Liberation, the interests held by the Rothschilds in the production and distribution of electricity and in insurance were nationalized by de Gaulle. Finally, in 1981, the Socialist-Communist coalition decreed the nationalization of the banks, thereby evicting them from the family building which had been theirs for 170 years on the rue Laffitte – the rue Laffitte which had become synonymous with the Rothschilds themselves. At the same time, the family lost control of the other businesses it had traditionally managed, such as the mining group based on Pennaroya and Le Nickel, and those inherited from the private holdings of the former railway companies.

The march of time always leaves casualties along the way. One can regret it, but it is only to be expected. If that were all, we'd only need to lick our wounds and silently suffer bitterness and sadness within the privacy of the family. But there are also all the people with whom the author of these lines collaborated in giving a new life to an institution that had been mummified since 1914, developing a bank and an industrial complex worthy of the French economy. All those people are broken-hearted to see the results of forty years of arduous effort annihilated. But that isn't the only point: the main question is the relationship of the Rothschilds with the government in power, to which they are at least an embarrassment if not the embodiment of evil.

The Rothschilds have an 'image' that is very special and very personal. They have become the proverbial symbol of wealth, a wealth which is evidenced with no pretence of guilt in their life-style. Furthermore, the succession of one generation after another at the head of their business has created the appearance of a dynasty – which is merely a fantasy.

In business, they are noted for a certain competence and scrupulous

behaviour, but in identifying them with the hypertrophy of private capitalism, they have been turned into 'untouchables'. One would think they are the only capitalists in France! In other societies, the attitude is different: in America, the idea of such long-standing success creates a favourable prejudice; in England, their proven professional ability, their celebrity, are recognized and encouraged as one of the national financial assets.

Many ordinary Frenchmen regard them with sympathy, vaguely perceptive no doubt of the scruples, the sacrifices, the constraints the Rothschilds have always imposed on themselves, not in order to show themselves to their advantage, but merely live up to what they think are their moral duties and their responsibilities as French citizens. Some of them appreciate the number of hospitals, schools, homes for children, for convalescents, for the elderly, the number of dispensaries, sanatoriums, social buildings of all kinds that the Rothschild family has built, furnished and maintained; the number of works of art it has donated to museums; the number of artists, scientists, doctors, writers, the family has been fortunate in being able to aid at one time or another.

Nevertheless, the politicians, conscious of the jealousy of wealth which is characteristic of the French, wish to keep them at arm's length. Quite a few take precautions before meeting a Rothschild, provide themselves with alibis. 'Rothschild, you understand, they attract attention!' Even if they are found likeable, they still remain as if plague-stricken.

I would hate to name those Ministers who have accepted me as a professional manager and have dealt with my problems solely on their merits. But I'd like them to know how grateful I am. And how touched I was by the high-minded statements made in Parliament a few days ago by two of its members.

A few contrasting examples are edifying:

When I was with the Free French in London in 1944 and had completed my mission of training liaison officers, I was offered a job which interested me enormously. When the confirmation hadn't arrived after several weeks of waiting, I learned that I'd been turned down because of my too conspicuous name.

Ten years later, when I went to the office of a Socialist Minister, a prominent member of the present government, to solve a minor problem concerning the MIFERMA project, I had to endure a preliminary mumbled speech, the gist of which was that he would never have received me, a representative of private capitalism, if my war record had not made up for that original sin. I didn't have the presence of mind to walk out.

Again, some time later, the same politician referred to Georges Pompidou as having collaborated with the family that had built a fortune on the misfortunes of France. He wasn't known to be such a Bonapartist!

One of the achievements of my career in which I thought I could take the greatest pride was the creation of a mining and metallurgical complex of international scope: IMETAL. It bore the Rothschild hallmark, from which it benefited on numerous occasions. But this state of affairs didn't fit the government's technological plans: certain persons went so far as to take advantage of the difficulties of a single sector in order to appropriate the entire group.

During a discussion of the bank nationalizations, a Minister recently stated

that the case of the Rothschilds differed from the rest in that they were a symbol.

Latent in normal times, the hostility and fear inspired by the Rothschilds breaks into delirium in time of crisis. When the Popular Front was in power in 1936, the family was one of its favourite targets.

In 1940, three weeks after the Armistice, the Vichy regime issued a decree depriving my father and my uncles, Robert and Henri, of French citizenship, striking them off the *Légion d'honneur*, confiscating their possessions. Their crime was having sought refuge in America, fleeing from the advancing German army instead of volunteering for cremation. Before joining the Free French, I had to face the sequestration of the bank, the seizure and dispersal of my family's possessions. The responsible minister, Alibert, referring to the decree regulating the spoliations and the way he'd applied it, said: 'Above all, I'm using this to get at the Rothschilds.'

Clearly, the nationalization of the banks isn't specifically aimed at the Rothschilds. We may not be the target, but we've been hit – as in a shooting accident, caused by those to whom the French have for a period carelessly entrusted guns. To those who are thinking: 'But you're decently compensated', I reply (is it for me to say this): 'Money isn't everything. Besides, we've never been for sale.'

The French Rothschilds made the mistake of believing that they could develop and grow with their time and in their own country; they were wrong.

The Socialist Radicals have excluded them from the economic community. Of the House of Rothschild there will remain a few odd pieces, perhaps nothing.

A Jew under Pétain, a pariah under Mitterand – for me it's enough. To rebuild on ruins twice in a lifetime is too much.

Forced into retirement, I have decided to strike.

Guy de Rothschild

The article was reprinted and commented on by the international press, and I was besieged with requests for interviews: television and radio, newspapers and magazines, in Europe and America. It obviously came at the right time, as the interest it aroused surpassed what might have been attributed to myself or to my family. Besides, it served as proof that our name was still famous and above all that it was associated with current events, enhanced and not enshrouded by its historic past.

By publicly expressing my views, I got them off my chest, as they say. I fulfilled what seemed to me to be my duty; I enjoyed the warmth of those spontaneous gestures of sympathy. But I still had to live through the factual event. Everything I'd been able to create or help to create during my lifetime – the bank, rejuvenated and greatly increased in size; a French multi-national corporation IMETAL – had been confiscated, my work demolished. I'd toiled for thirty-five years to no avail. At the end of 1980, my family controlled a group in which the banking sector, including

subsidiaries, produced a balance sheet of 13 billion francs, with 2,000 employees and 70,000 clients. The industrial and commercial sectors, including all subsidiaries, employed more than 30,000 people throughout the world, possessed 1.4 billion francs in equity base and accounted for an annual turnover of 26 billion francs. This entire structure was expropriated in exchange for a total indemnity amounting to 80 per cent of . . . the value of the building on the rue Laffitte!

During the following weeks, it became time to think of the future and of the conduct that we, the French branch of the family, should now adopt. Should we lie low and concern ourselves only with our material survival, after the collapse of our position? Neither Marie-Hélène nor I care to live elsewhere than in France, but how could I forget that twice in my lifetime France has singled out the Rothschilds as a symbol to be destroyed? As I reflected more deeply, our position gradually became clearer to me in a historical perspective. The reputation and prestige of the Rothschilds remain a priceless asset, but how vulnerable! They depend essentially on the credibility and validity of our banking houses. Should these decline or disappear, we'd be nothing. Such is the situation in France where, whatever the causes, we appear as the defeated. Should our name ever become synonymous with 'relic of the past', it would seem even more embarrassing than nostalgic.

Having overcome my discouragement, I arrived at what seemed to be the only possible conclusion: to accept the challenge of destiny and actively participate in the development of the Rothschild firm in New York, so that it would be of material and moral benefit as much to the French family as to the English branch, with which we share this venture. Creating a small Rothschild bank in France would certainly be desirable, if such a possibility were offered to us; in which event, my son David proposes to ensure its management. I ardently wish it success and hope that at the end of the road the same fate . . .

But only in the United States will we be able to re-establish the necessary international standing. My fighting instinct overcame my reticence, and I decided to settle alone in New York, for several years if necessary.

A prominent figure of the 'new regime', a friendly and moderate individual, recently criticized my decision to emigrate. I felt as if I'd suddenly returned to forty years ago, at the time of futile debates on whether or not one was guilty in leaving Occupied France. But today we're not at war. And contrary to a certain narrow view of patriotism, French citizens who reside abroad are neither useless nor disloyal. It's understandable that certain members of the Left may regret some of the consequences of the measures taken against my family. But they can't repair the damage

by urging us to become provincials in Paris, condemned to a permanent inferiority with respect to our international colleagues.

Logical reflection showed me the way. But it was sentimentally that I was most affected by the loss of the rue Laffitte and of all 'the House' meant to me. Of course, the government's objective was not to evict us from our building, but the bank is inseparable from it, owned it; exclusion from one could only mean exclusion from both.

The modern building we had built and decorated with enthusiasm was the continuation of the old one; for us, it had not demolished but succeeded it. It was its reincarnation rather than its replacement.

The old-time rue Laffitte seemed to revive before my eyes: the concierge of number 19, with his greatcoat in winter and his odd flabby hat all year round; the door under the archway that had to be opened by the bolt because the handle didn't function – a ploy to discourage burglars (very inexperienced ones!); the little staircase leading to 'the Room', and next to it a decrepit lift that hadn't worked in my lifetime and whose usefulness I was never able to imagine. Then all the traditions of former days returned to mind: the mail that could be opened only by a partner (it used to be delivered to my father on the rue Saint-Florentin in a red leather case before being returned to the bank for distribution); the obligation the Rothschilds imposed on themselves of personally signing every document, whatever its nature, even during holidays.

We'd conserved from the past more than appeared at first glance. A discreet atmosphere, ushers in tailcoats, obliging and attentive. No ceremony, but no carelessness – a far cry from the negligence that frequently reigns in public buildings. On the rue Laffitte everything was impeccable: not a single stray paper was in sight, flowers and plants adorned each landing, everything reflected a concern for brightness and beauty.

In addition, for the privileged such as we, there was a staff which made life easy and pleasant. Efficient secretaries organized life, competent services provided us with financial, legal and tax advice. The bank was our accountant, lawyer, counsellor, business manager, secretary, confidant. Many of our clients received the same attentions we did, and many of them expressed their devotion.

Large or small, a business enterprise has a distinct personality, independent from those who manage it. It becomes a living entity, it has a life of its own; it prospers, it suffers, it grows, it is endangered. A demanding individual, its successes are a reward for its employees and managers. In exchange for sacrifices, it offers emotional security; dedication to its purpose dispels anxiety and excludes boredom. It distills a magic potion as enslaving as a drug; and when one must leave for good, its

unsuspecting victim suffers all the pangs of detoxication, finds himself alone, useless, idle, empty.

A few steps away from the bank is the synagogue of the rue de la Victoire; could it be merely a coincidence? How often during our childhood, and since then, had we met our fathers at the rue Laffitte to go together to attend a religious service. Later on, it was our sons who joined us. How many meetings have been held at the rue Laffitte to seek means for aiding unfortunate Jews who were persecuted or in danger! How many social and cultural institutions have been founded, improved, modified, supported, developed, managed, maintained, during discussions in the dark corridors or discreet offices of the old house or the new building, which was for 170 years the permanent headquarters of an important part of Jewish life in France!

In his will, my grandfather, Alphonse de Rothschild, insisted on this last wish:

> I urgently request that all my children as well as the other members of the family continue as far as possible to gather together on the days of important religious holidays, in the rooms of our house at 19 rue Laffitte which were dedicated to this pious purpose by my late father and my mother, in order to celebrate the event together, and to maintain the family solidarity in a united community of sentiments. This solidarity has always been our strength and our grandeur . . .

After the bank had changed in nature and size in 1968, it was no longer possible to continue the traditional reception line for distributing Christmas envelopes to the personnel by the partners themselves. It was replaced by a large cocktail party, with over one thousand guests. The last to be held under the aegis of the Rothschilds took place in December 1981, a few weeks before the nationalization went into effect. I attended it, as I did each year, but this time with a heavy heart to have to say goodbye to so many men and women of every rank, some of whom I scarcely knew, others whom I knew well, to whom I was profoundly attached. It was the fraternity of people who participated under the same name, in the same task, with the same concerns, in the same enterprise, which they identified with my family. All of them, all of us, wanted to go on living and working together; our enforced separation was like a wound.

I shook dozens and dozens of hands of people who could hardly hold back their tears; for them, as for me, it was the end of a world. And in my sorrow I could feel how much I was devoted to them, how much we formed an affective entity which was our strength and pride. When I left the room, I held my head high through habit, but my heart was very heavy.

None of us were then aware of the grief that lay in store: my cousin Alain

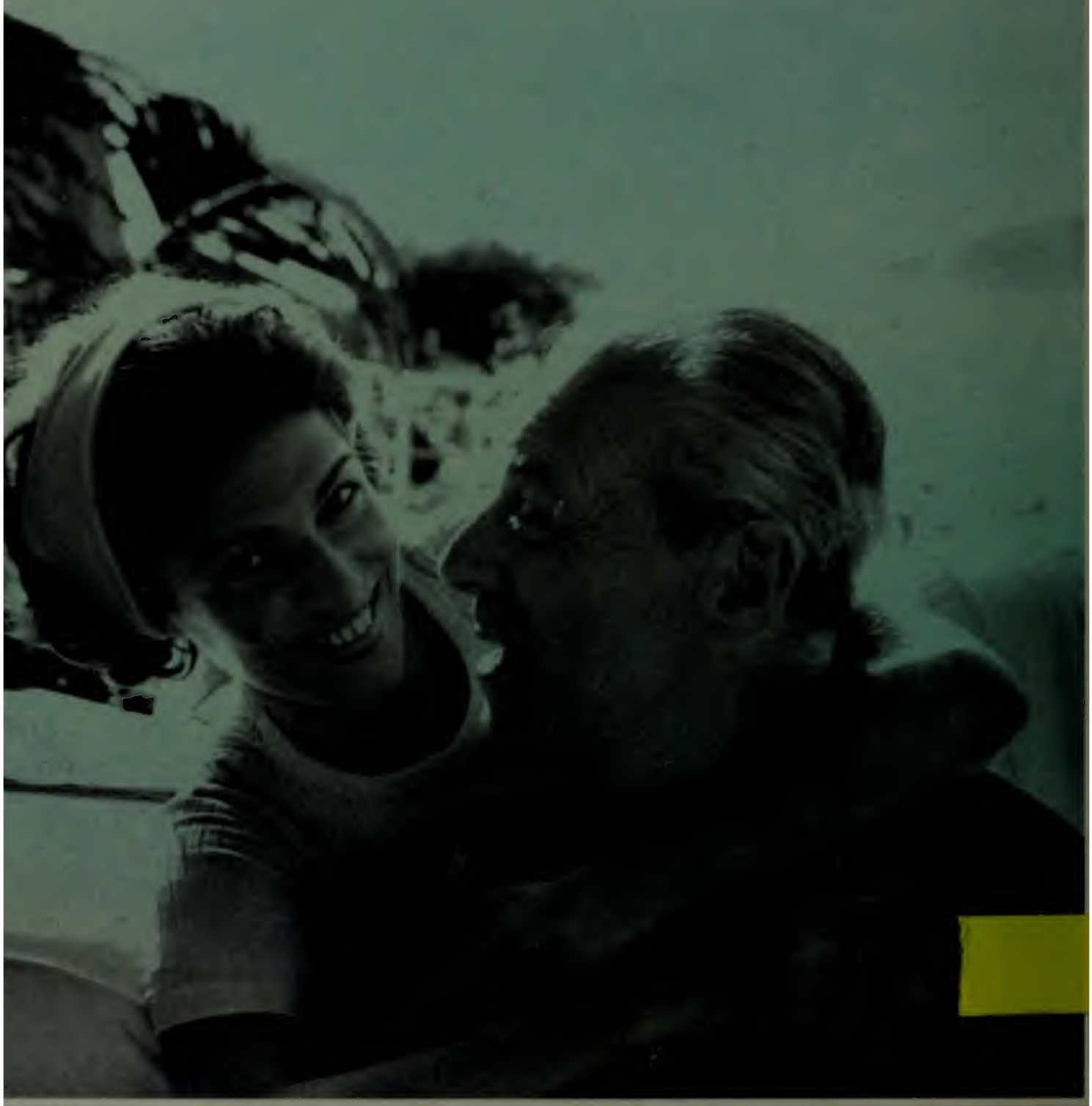
died a few months later. Having in the space of a year to break away from our past and to face major worries as leader of the Jewish community was too much for him.

The Rothschilds have left the rue Laffitte forever. It's a violation, it's the stranger in the house, it's cutting the umbilical cord from the placenta.

I lived there more than fifty years of my life, more hours than I've spent in bed, more years than in any other house, more experiences, more worries, more satisfactions, than anywhere else. I have accumulated more remembrances there than in all the rest of my memory. I'll never return, unless I'm forced to do so flanked by two policemen. I'll try never to enter that street again. I'll try to live, think, work and dream somewhere else. But never will I forget the rue Laffitte. All that remains is a memory of the past, like Cinderella returning from the ball. The glass slipper has vanished, the party has disappeared, one cannot see it again, one is blind. The curtain has fallen.

One is only defeated when one accepts defeat, said Marshal Foch. Inspired by this motto and as if I were still young, I intend to accept the challenge. Contrary to Cinderella, I'll set forth in search of another slipper, which I hope we will never lose.

The essence of life is to fight as if never to die.

Guy de Rothschild

— THE WHIMS OF FORTUNE —